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THE EVOLUTION OF MODERN HEBREW LITERATURE 1850-1912

BY

ABRAHAM SOLOMON WALDSTEIN

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PREFACE

In writing this book, I have had in view not so much the appreciation of the individual authors and their productions per se, as their relation to the period in which they lived, the ideas and emotions by which they were, consciously or unconsciously, actuated, and what they contributed, as individuals or as a class, to the development of Hebrew literature. In short, I purpose to give here the evolution of the latter rather than its history, in the common sense of the term. This mode of treatment has been more and more pursued by literary historians since Taine; and should, in particular, be followed by any one that writes for a reading public to whom the literature treated is entirely foreign. Readers such as these are certainly more interested in the trend of thought, in the flux and flow of ideas, and in the artistic temperament of the period as a whole and in the literature as a whole, than in any particular writer. Hence, some authors, who would otherwise deserve a fuller treatment, have been dealt with rather summarily. For though as individual writers they may be of very high standing, yet their contribution to the *development* of Hebrew literature may have been less marked than that of other writers of inferior talent, who have, nevertheless, formed links in the chain of this development, and who have consequently been treated more fully.

I have selected as my subject the period between the fifties of the last century and our own time, and I did not go back to the middle of the eighteenth century, which is generally considered the terminus *a quo* of modern Hebrew literature, for the following reason. As I am here dealing mainly with belles-lettres and allied branches, I could have found very little scope in the literature of the hundred years preceding the middle of the nineteenth century. The novel in Hebrew had not yet been produced. In the domain of poetry, the only productions of the

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period that can stand critical examination are: some lyrical outbursts in the dramas of M. H. Luzzatto, a small number of poems by Wessely, Sh. Cohen, Letteris, Adam Lebensohn, and some other stray verse, representing in all perhaps one medium-sized volume. Moreover, with the exception of some passages in the *scientific* "letters" of S. D. Luzzatto, the prose of the period did not even present what one may call literary temperament. The spirit of the time, particularly that of the first half of the nineteenth century, was scientific, the writers centering their efforts mainly on historic research; and only in this field did Hebrew literature show any sort of creativeness. But the account of these investigations could hardly fit into the scheme of this book. I have, therefore, relegated this long period in modern Hebrew, as well as a brief account of Mediaeval Hebrew literature, to the introductory chapter.

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THE EVOLUTION OF MODERN HEBREW LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

I. POST-BIBLICAL HEBREW LITERATURE

Hebrew literature did not end with the close of the Canon of the Old Testament, but has continued its existence through all the devious paths of Jewish history down to our own time, always expressing the spirit, the influences, the material and spiritual condition of the Jewish people during the long ages of its struggle and suffering. During all these years, Hebrew literature has shared the fortunes of the Jewish people, it has been swayed by the same influences, and subject to the same varying atmospheric pressure. For two reasons the line of demarcation between the different periods of this literature stands out very clearly against the light of history, perhaps more than in any other literature. In the first place, as the Jewish spirit has always been collective rather than individualistic, the movement of Hebrew literature has generally been, so to speak, en masse; and it is always easier to define the limits of a collective movement than to trace individual tastes and influences. Secondly, the various periods of Hebrew literature, at least up to the nineteenth century, were as a whole co-extensive with the periods of Jewish history as connected with this or that particular country. It is enough to recall to mind the history of the Jews in Spain, for example, and the so-called Spanish period of Hebrew literature immediately stands before the mind's eye, clear-cut, well-rounded, and well-defined. The division of Hebrew literature into distinct periods, is, therefore, easy and natural.

The literary production that immediately followed the Bible, that was dependent upon it and, in a manner, created in its

spirit, was the Talmudic literature. This, probably, embraces a longer period than that of the Bible, beginning long before the close of the Canon of the Old Testament and continuing down to the tenth century, when the Talmudic colleges in Babylonia were closed—an event which practically amounted to the closing of the Talmudic Canon. Like the Biblical literature, that of the Talmud bears the stamp of the collective spirit of the Jewish people rather than that of the individual; in it, likewise, the influence of foreign culture is almost imperceptible. Furthermore, in the latter as in the former, we still inhale the fresh and fragrant odor of mother earth, the Talmudic activity having begun while the Jews were still leading a fully developed organic and national life. Even in Babylon, where the Talmud was given its final and most complete shape, they enjoyed a semi-autonomous life, engaging in all the various economic pursuits of the land, and standing in close touch with nature—perhaps more so than at any other time in the diaspora. As a result, we find reflected in the Talmud, in its Halakic as well as in its Agadic part, an all-sided and complete national existence.

For some time before the close of the Talmudic Canon, a change had been gradually taking place in Hebrew literature, affecting both its content and its form. This change was mainly due to the fact that Hebrew literature had come under the potent influence of Arabic culture. The various literary branches, which, in the Talmud, had been heaped in a confused jumble, now began to be differentiated and systematized, while, at the same time, the individual element became more defined and more pronounced. This period culminated in the so-called Spanish age in Hebrew literature (c. 1000–1300), the Iberian peninsula then being the main center of literary activity. It was a time of real creativeness, during which Hebrew, though influenced by the Arabic, struck out on a path of its own. In Rabbinics, it was the most intellectual age, giving Talmudic literature an almost scientific treatment as regards classification and interpretation. In poetry, it was, with the exception of our own time, the most flourishing age in the diaspora, pro-

ducing such noble poets as Ibn Gebirol and Halevi. In romance, too, some not unsuccessful attempts were made. As for speculation, it was the period of the creation of a religious philosophy and of grammatical and other sciences, both among the Arabs and among the Jews. This age, as was natural, laid its impress upon subsequent productions in Hebrew. The rime—borrowed from the Arabs—which had been first introduced into Hebrew poetry during this time,[1] dominated Hebrew versification down to the beginning of the eighteenth century, and the meter, also Arabic in origin, exerted an influence even as late as the middle of the nineteenth, whereas the creations of that period were a perennial source of inspiration for later poets and philosophers. But, as if exhausted by the too great intellectual strain, Hebrew literature, for the next three or four hundred years, presents almost a blank. The violent persecutions of the Jews on the part of the Christian world and the consequent segregation of the former in the Ghettos and their indulgence in Rabbinic casuistry, on the one hand, and in Kabbalah, on the other, robbed them of the joy of life, and together with it, of the real power of literary creativeness. Here and there a Jewish scholar may have culled some gleanings from the thought of the Spanish masters, now and then a noble piyut (hymn) may have been indited, but as a whole, little of lasting value was created during this time.

The beginning of the eighteenth century marks a renaissance in Hebrew letters. It was in Italy that the revival was initiated. The Jews of that country had been for centuries under the influence of Spanish Jewry; with them, moreover, a number of Jews driven from Spain had found refuge. In Italy, therefore, the tradition of the Jews of the Iberian peninsula and their splendid achievements lingered to a later age than elsewhere in Europe, with the exception of Turkey. It is only when we bear these facts in mind that we are able to understand the appearance in Italy of a literary phenomenon such as M. H. Luzzatto, a

[1] The first Hebrew poet known to have used rime was the paitan Yannai (ca. 700 C. E.). He used as his model the Arabic rimed prose, or rime without meter (saj). G. Karpeles, "Geschichte der Judischen Literatur," 2te Auflage, v. 1, p. 325. Cf. Nicholson, "A Literary History of the Arabs," p. 74.

religious philosopher, nay, a Kabbalist *par excellence*, and, at the same time, a poet and dramatist of a modern stamp. For only among the Rabbis of Spain could his prototype be found. Luzzatto, it is true, was influenced in his lyrical dramas by the Italian; in fact, he adapted a couple of dramas from that language; it is not, however, in the dramatic but in the lyrical element that the importance of his works lies. Luzzatto has, moreover, the merit of having discredited the heavy and artificial Arabic rime and, to a great extent, also the meter,[1] under which the Hebrew poets had labored since the days of Dunash Ibn Labrat (tenth century).

The revival in Hebrew literature, however, began as a movement about the middle of the eighteenth century. During his generation, Luzzatto had stood almost alone in his literary endeavors. He did not even have a reading public (it is characteristic that his masterpiece "La-Yesharim Tehillah" was published in fifty copies only); but the impulse that he had given to modernism in Hebrew bore fruit in the following generation. At this time Germany became the main center of activity. Italy, it is true, still continued to contribute its share to Jewish learning as well as to Hebrew literature. The sonnet, for example, which originated in Italy, was first introduced into Hebrew by the poets of that country, notably by the Luzzatto family. But Germany now became the center from which there radiated to the Jews influences not only literary but also social and educational.

Hebrew literature in the German period centered around a monthly called "Meassef" (the Magazine), after which the whole period is named (the period of the Measseﬁm). The promoters of this magazine, a group of lovers of Hebrew in Koenigsberg and elsewhere in Germany, were the disciples of Moses Mendelssohn, the German-Jewish philosopher and Schoengeist. In those days Europe was dominated by the rationalistic rather than the scientific temper, and cosmopolitan rather than nationalistic tendencies held sway. To the latter fact may, at least partly,

[1] "Leshon Limmudim," the part that is still in manuscript.

be attributed Mendelssohn's dictum that the Jews represented a religious but not a national body. And these tendencies, together with the precept of their teacher, were introduced into literature by the Hebrew writers of the time. The latter, moreover, were not quite earnest about their work in Hebrew; they regarded it partly as a pastime, partly as a sort of introduction to the native literature. Hence, the Hebrew literature of the time had no atmosphere of its own and could, therefore, not present any real originality or creativeness, or even temperament and personality. Imbued with the rationalistic spirit, it possessed all the dryness and lack of imagination and emotion characteristic of rationalism; and disregarding the national element, it neglected a living source of inspiration, which might have stood Hebrew poetry in good stead.[1]

The writers of the Meassefim period were thus too devoid of earnestness to be able to create a great literary movement. They had neither the genius to rise above the level of imitation, nor the refinement of soul of their spiritual leader, Mendelssohn, to create even an ephemeral aesthetic philosophy. The literary heritage that this period left to Hebrew was, therefore, not great; yet it laid its impress upon the productions in that language down to the middle of the nineteenth century, and beyond. This century of Hebrew literature (c. 1750–1850) is generally called the Haskalah period. Strictly speaking, however, it is the first stage of the Haskalah period, in contradistinction from its second stage, which falls during the second half of the nineteenth century and which will be treated at length in the main body of the book. Haskalah connotes enlightenment, education, whence the name Maskilim, the enlightened, illuminati, the votaries of Haskalah. The atmosphere of this period was the same as that of the Meassefim. The spirit was rationalistic and, to say the least, not nationalistic, whereas the literary creations were almost entirely devoid of the personal element and, with very few exceptions, occasional, perfunctory, ephemeral. The odor of the salon, of mutual admiration and self-satisfaction, permeates the works of

[1] F. Delitzsch, "Zur Geschichte der juedischen Poesie," Leipzig, 1836, p. 105.

the Maskilim, as it does, to some extent, the European literature of the time. As for the religious attitude of the Maskilim of this period, though their beliefs as influenced by the German illuminati, were tinged with deistic tendencies, yet they did not go out in open warfare against the accepted Jewish ceremonies; but, in this respect, were conciliatory rather than otherwise. This characteristic draws a sharp line of distinction between them and the Maskilim of the second stage of the Haskalah period, whose attitude towards the faith of their people was militant and antagonistic.

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century the center of activity in Hebrew literature was transferred to Galicia. In Germany, many causes had conspired to effect a divorce between the Hebrew language and Jewry. The economic condition of the latter was probably the main factor in effecting this breach. As big traders and merchants, the Jews of that country, chafing under the pressure of political disabilities, then still prevailing in Germany, found the native language more available than Hebrew for purposes both of commerce and emancipation. Hebrew, therefore, passed away from Germany with the last issue of the Meassef. In Galicia, however, the economic and social position of the Jews was different There they were leading more or less a sedentary Ghetto life, being petty traders and artisans; hence, the necessity for studying the native language was not so strongly felt among them. Moreover, in Galicia, a country of divers tongues, Hebrew could easily hold its own among the Jews. This language, therefore, became a more natural literary expression of the illuminati in this country than it had been in Germany.

The gains that Hebrew literature made during this subdivision of the Haskalah period were, as above indicated, hardly in the domain of belles-lettres, the novel not yet having been invented and the poem still being dominated by the spirit of the Meassefim. The only progress made was in the so-called Hokmath Yisrael (Jewish Science), which was undoubtedly influenced by Biblical criticism and historical investigation which then came to the

fore. Among the Jews, however, there was only one man, N. Krochmal, who made an independent and somewhat systematic study of the Biblical times. For the rest, Jewish Science centered its energy upon the middle ages, a preference to be accounted for by the fact that for the Jew, the pious Jew—the initiator of this study, S. J. Rapoport, and many other scholars engaging in it were orthodox Jews—the mediaeval times presented less slippery ground than those of the Bible.

This age, commonly called the Galician period of Hebrew literature, was by no means confined to Galicia. There, it is true, Hokmath Yisrael was initiated, and there the magazines busying themselves with it were published; but Jewish science had able representatives also in other countries: Germany, Russia, Italy; and as for poetry, the foremost poet of the time, Adam Lebensohn, was not a Galician but a Russian Jew.

In Russia, the Haskalah movement, which was introduced somewhat later than elsewhere, assumed a peculiar character. In other places it was influenced by surrounding circumstances and surrounding cultures; in that country it was hardly touched, at its inception, by the Russian spirit, but was still dominated by that of Germany. Many reasons may be adduced for this cultural phenomenon. In the first place, the Haskalah in Russia was a continuation of that in Germany. Then, again, German, the parent language of the Jewish vernacular, Yiddish, was more accessible, even to the Russian Jews, than the native Russian. Finally, as the movement was first introduced into Lithuania, notably Wilna, it could hardly be touched by Russian culture or literature; for these had not yet spread beyond the pale of Russia proper.[1] And it was not till about the middle of

[1] Several examples may here be cited in corroboration of this:—(*a*) The Maskilim in Russia were surnamed by their adversaries, till late in the 19th century, Berlinites, *i. e.*, people permeated by the spirit prevalent in Berlin. (*b*) Nicholas I, in his endeavors to educate the Jews, employed a German apparatus simultaneously with a Russian. A German Jew, Lilienthal, was entrusted with the task, and in some places the language of the school established by the government for the Jews, was not Russian but German. (*c*) The mutual ignorance of each other's life was so great with the Jew and the Russian, that the Shylock character, in which the typical and professional rogue is

the nineteenth century, after Rùssia had taken the lead in Hebrew literature, that Russian influences began to tell upon the Haskalah, leading it off on a divergent line. With this phase, however, we come to the very subject with which this book purports to deal.

2. THE EVOLUTION OF POST-BIBLICAL HEBREW

It is difficult to tell in what direction Hebrew might have developed, had its life-thread not been broken some two thousand years ago. Its sister language, Arabic, has separated, since the days of Arabic conquest and the flourishing of Arabic civilization, into a literary and a vernacular, which are almost as distinctly different from each other as two dialects can be. The linguistic deposits that the successive waves of nationalities had left in Greece since its Byzantine period, had so profoundly affected the language that only with difficulty did it escape, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, becoming a mere daughter language of ancient Greece. And yet Greek and Arabic flourished, declined, and revived again on their native soil, having constantly had the touch of mother earth to renew their failing strength. In the case of Hebrew, which is in the possession of a race widely scattered and of highly assimilative powers, would it not have become a mixture of tongues and dialects as differentiated from each other and from the mother tongue as the Romance or the Germanic languages have become? Even as it is, there has been a marked distinction between the styles of the Hebrew authors living in different countries, where the influence of the various foreign languages is noticeable.

This is, however, idle speculation. Hebrew did cease to be a living tongue in the sense of everyday use, as far back as the Babylonian exile, remaining down to our own time merely a language of the book. And yet Hebrew has been to the Jews

represented as a Jew, was again and again repeated in Russian literature in the first half of the nineteenth century, being found even among the noblest of Russian writers: Poushkin, Gogol, Lermontov, Turgeniev, for example,—a phenomenon much less frequently to be met with in the second half of the nineteenth century.

more than Latin has been to the learned world. The latter language became colorless with the last Roman; in the post-Roman period, it has never borne the impress of the genius of any nationality—not even in Italy, the habitat of the nearest of kin to the Romans, and not even in the days of the Renaissance, when the greatest enthusiasm for Latin prevailed. Hebrew, on the other hand, has never ceased to receive the impress of the national genius, as it has never ceased to represent it. It is true, that in the course of its history, Hebrew received some telling influences from the outside—a process inevitable in the case of a language that has constantly been in touch with so many and such varied tongues in the diaspora. Yet Hebrew has essentially retained its original and national purity even down to the present time, when, with the expansion of its literature in all directions, the sluices were opened for an inrush of borrowed terms and for the creation of countless neologisms.

The evolution of post-Biblical Hebrew down to recent times has been going on in stages, each one of which has left its peculiar mark upon the language. There was, in the first place, the Mishnaic-Talmudic-Midrashic literature, which presents a style and terminology quite different from those of Biblical Hebrew. I mention this triple literature in one breath, because it bears, in general, a common character; there is, however, some difference between the individual parts, in contents as well as in linguistic contribution. The Mishna, comprising theologic and juristic decisions, presents a keen contrast, with its dry, precise, and lucid style, to the pregnant, impassioned, and paraphrastic diction of the Bible. But, though recruited to some extent from Latin, Greek, and Aramaic, its neologisms are fundamentally Hebraic. The Talmud and the Midrash, on the other hand, written mainly in the Jewish vernacular of the time, Aramaic, offer a style and terminology that incline towards those of the latter, even where Hebrew holds its own against it. Now, it can not be known how much the colloquial ancient Hebrew contributed to the terminology of this triple literature; certain it is that the wealth of new terms stored up or created in the

latter, made possible the manifold development of later Hebrew literature.

The transition of the Hebrew to the so-called Spanish period was a gain in another direction, in style and vocabulary. For Rabbinics, the Talmudic literature had provided both style and terminology, and for poetry and romance Biblical Hebrew offered a plentiful supply. Not so with philosophy and science, particularly the former. The Biblical and Talmudic styles are anything but philosophic. There is a total absence of philosophic terms, such as have been created by the Greeks, for instance, or even of theologic terms such as we discover in the scholastic literature. The philosophy of life and the Godhead are treated in the Bible and in the Talmud in images rather than in terms. When, therefore, under the influence of the Arabs, Greek thought and its demand for precision were to be dealt with in Hebrew, there was no escape by circuitous ways, by paraphrase and circumlocution. A philosophic terminology had to be created; and it was created. And if we add to this gain that of the terminology of grammatical science, we will have a conception of the linguistic contributions of that period to Hebrew.

The space of a few hundred years intervening between the Spanish period and the eighteenth century added hardly anything either literary or linguistic to Hebrew; but the gains of the preceding periods provided the latter with a working vocabulary for a modern literature, which was to become constantly richer in contents and wider in scope. Not that all the wealth of style and vocabulary created and hoarded up during the preceding ages were exploited right at the beginning of the modern period. On the contrary, the terminology of post-Biblical Hebrew literature was at first rejected as not puristic enough and only that of the Bible was reverted to. Many reasons may be adduced for this return to the original source of the Hebrew. The beginnings of modern Hebrew literature were made by Jewish writers in Germany, where the Talmud was less known and less valued than in other countries. Then, again, the appreciation of the Bible as a work of art having

just begun, it was natural for that generation to give the preference to the picturesque Biblical diction rather than to the unadorned though more precise later Hebrew style. And, so, just as the renaissance in Italy brought with it the cultivation and imitation of the classic Latin, and in France the imitation of the classic Greek (notably Ronsard), in the same way the renaissance in Hebrew literature expressed its admiration of classic Hebrew by the rejection of any word or form not found in the Bible.

Had the Hebrew literature of that time stood in closer contact with life, this tendency would have been swept away by the demands of reality, which could not be satisfied with the flowery style and the few hundred roots found in the entire treasury of the Bible. And in fact, whenever a scientific subject was dealt with—a grammar, a philosophic work, a book on "Jewish Science"—recourse had to be had to the mediaeval accretions of the Hebrew.[1] Literature proper, however, belles-lettres and allied branches, was not only limited to the Biblical vocabulary, but was stylistically an imitation and, in its greatest part, an abuse, of the style and phraseology of the Bible. The flowery, "Melizah," phrase, a euphemism of peculiar character, half imitation and half distortion of the Biblical verse to suit a certain fanciful meaning, entirely mastered Hebrew literature.

This condition was, of course, incongruous with the conception of a modern Hebrew literature, and could, therefore, remain unmodified only so long as the latter held aloof from life and confined itself to the abstract. But the further its scope widened and the more frequently it began to deal with live problems, the keener the question arose of the adaptability of Hebrew to

[1] It may here be remarked that the speculative writings in Hebrew were dominated during that time, and till late in the nineteenth century, by the diction of the Spanish-Jewish thinkers. Now, most of the works of these thinkers were originally written in Arabic and only later were they translated into Hebrew. And, as translation had then not yet risen to the height of an art, the versions were so greatly marred by Arabisms as very frequently to obscure the sense. Yet, these solecisms, strange to say, infiltrated themselves even into modern philosophic and historic works, and it was not till recent times that they were entirely eliminated from the Hebrew.

modern life and thought. If this language was to become the real and effective mouthpiece of the latter, then it could not remain on the level that history had placed it some two thousand years previously. This fact became clear, for the first time, with the establishment of the first modern Hebrew weekly, "Ha-Maggid," in 1856, and demands for the modernization of the language accordingly became insistent;[1] but it was not till much later, under the influence of the national revival, when Hebrew began to develop in Palestine even as a vernacular, that these demands assumed definite form, bringing the language back to the point where it had left off at the end of the Spanish period, and resuming the work of adapting it to modern needs.

Neo-Hebrew, whether in its literary aspect or as a vernacular, has not gone so far from the original as modern Greek, for instance. The process of development of the Hebrew as a vernacular is too recent for that; and it is always easier to preserve the purity of a language in literature than in speech. Yet, it does not require the gift of prophecy to predict that before long ancient Hebrew will disappear under new linguistic layers. Even now, Biblical Hebrew has been almost overlapped by modern creations; so much so that one nursed upon the Haskalah literature will only with difficulty master the present style and vocabulary, unless the thread of development has been closely followed. And what direction Hebrew will take when modern life and culture will be at its height in Palestine can easily be foreseen.

Neo-Hebrew has developed on the following main lines: The Bible, the original source of Hebrew, has, needless to say, been thoroughly ransacked and fully exploited. The Talmudic literature, too, which forms a really inexhaustible mine for neo-Hebraic purposes, has been resorted to extensively. And the same was the case with the reproductions of the Spanish period. As for new creations in our own time—and their name is legion—there has been, besides the self-reproducing neologisms, a wide choice of general European terms and words from the sister language,

[1] *Ha-Maggid*, 1861, Nos. 9, 10, 15.

Arabic, with which the Hebrew vocabulary has been recruited. As for the grammatical and idiomatic structure of the sentence, it has essentially remained the same as that of the old Hebrew. Yet many important changes have been affected in this direction, making the language more flexible and bringing it nearer to modern analytic tongues. A few instances may here be given.[1] The Hebrew perfect, imperfect, and participle, which were long ago pressed into the service of the past, future, and present respectively, are being more and more strictly adhered to in their latter function, and together with it there has again come into good use the past progressive—the participle with the perfect of the verb *hayah* (to be)—already employed in the Talmud, under the influence of the Aramaic. The verbal forms of the latter language, shafel and nithpael, and, less frequently, nithpoel, have been made extensive use of; and, at the same time, verbs found in the Bible, say, in only qal or piel have also been put into the other grammatical forms. Verbs have been constructed from general European terms mostly in the piel, whereas new nouns have been created in accordance with the verbal form in which the root is found in Hebrew.

From this brief sketch of the development of Hebrew from the time it ceased to be a spoken tongue until it has reappeared in our own time as a vernacular, one may see that it has never been a dead language, in the real sense of the term. It has continued growing and leading some sort of life, however inane this life may have been at times, acting as the mouthpiece of the most characteristic Jewish productions and supplying certain national demands. Moreover, in the long course of its development, it has become more supple and plastic, and thus adaptable to modern usage. As for the future of this language it depends upon the vitality of the Jewish people and upon the measure of cultural independence that the latter will be able to maintain in Palestine and elsewhere.

[1] The reader may be referred in this respect to the excellent work of Dr. Leo Metman: "Die Hebraeische Sprache," Jerusalem, 1904.

CHAPTER I

ROMANTICISM, THE CREATION OF THE HEBREW NOVEL

THE middle of the nineteenth century is not merely a conventional time-division in the history of Hebrew literature, but is a natural boundary line sharply marking off two distinct literary tendencies and types of literature. Modern Hebrew literature already had had behind it a history of some hundred years,—a history interesting at least as regards the influences it had undergone in the course of its wandering from country to country. But, with the exception of the endeavors of the so-called Jewish Science (Hokmath Yisrael) during the Galician period, modern Hebrew literature could hardly lay claim to any originality or creativeness. It was, in the main, in spirit as well as in form, composed of imitations, generally poor imitations, of the productions of the surrounding European literatures. In spirit, it was deistic, rationalistic, cosmopolitan, of the colorless type that prevailed, say, among the German "illuminati" at the end of the eighteenth century, or among the French writers of the Voltairian school,—minus the revolutionary spirit of the latter. There was in Hebrew literature, and, for that matter, in Hebrew society at large, no truly great ideal, national or even cosmopolitan, towards which to strive, no great passion to stir the emotions, no broad perspective to fire the imagination. The ephemeral, the occasional, the petty, satisfied the Hebrew poet and the writer, and interested the Hebrew reader. Only at rare intervals could you hear a truer, deeper, more original note.

The middle of the nineteenth century brought a new departure in Hebrew literature. At that time there appeared a volume of poems, small in compass, but of a freshness, originality, and sincerity hitherto unknown,—poems that were for Hebrew what the "Lyrical Ballads" of Wordsworth and Coleridge had been for English literature. The beginning of the fifties, moreover,

saw what was of even greater importance: the birth of the Hebrew novel. And this new departure manifested itself not only in the quality but also in the spirit, in the temper, of the new literary productions. The same transformation that had taken place in European literature at the beginning of the century, was now imperceptibly taking place in the Hebrew. In the latter, as in the former, the reaction was against the dryness, the unction, the formality, of the old pseudo classic literary spirit,—a reaction that resulted in the so-called Romantic movement.

In Hebrew literature, however, this new movement can be termed romantic by courtesy only. It was so symptomatically, but not consciously. The search for the mystico-romantic "blue flower" could hardly become a real passion with the modern, sober-minded Jew. Besides, in Hebrew, romanticism was a belated blossom. It came into the world when even a Hugo was renouncing it in European literature, when Flaubert was already producing his realistic masterpieces, and when the predominance of the "fourth estate" with its *real* struggles and demands, was being established in politics as well as in literature. Hence, Hebrew romanticism, in the first place, was of short duration, and, in the second place, assumed a healthier aspect than, let us say, German romanticism. It expressed itself in a love for the ancient and the mediaeval, in a religiosity—in the case of Lebensohn, the poet of the period,—in a greater appreciation of nature, and in a love for romantic adventure of the kind represented in the works of Eugene Sue.

The embodiment of romanticism in poetry was Micah Joseph Lebensohn (1828–1852). He was the son of Adam Lebensohn, a sentimental, conventional poet, well known in his day and of considerable influence upon Hebrew poetry. As the son of a Maskil, M. J. Lebensohn enjoyed from his childhood a more thorough secular education than the contemporary Hebrew writers. The transition from the Jewish—the sacred—to the profane mode of thought was, therefore, with him, not accom-

panied by the internal struggle and the moral strain that went with the transition of the Maskilim who, in their youth, had been confined to "the four cubits of the Law." Lebensohn thus grew up in a freer atmosphere than they, and he was more sincerely and more completely given to the enjoyment of life and its beauties. Hence, we find in his poems, for the first time in modern Hebrew literature, sincerely passionate notes of nature and of love.

The poems of Lebensohn fall into two divisions: historic or narrative and purely lyrical poems. The romantic tendency of the poet finds utterance particularly in the former. The background is historic, ancient or mediaeval, and there is manifest in them a religious yearning, which, indeed, pervades almost all his poems, but which is strongest here. The best, longest, and most representative of these poems is "Faith and Knowledge," or, as the exposition to the title runs: "To prove that faith gives man joy during his lifetime and delight even after death, and that knowledge without faith deprives him of both." The poem is composed of "two illustrations" taken from the two traditional or legendary phases of the life of king Solomon: that of Solomon the young man, full of youthful vigor, the lover of Shulamith, and the author of Canticles, and that of Solomon the old man, the pessimistic philosopher and author of Ecclesiastes. In a mystico-romantic fashion Lebensohn connects the youthful optimism of Solomon with religious faith, and the pessimism of his old age with lack of faith, and like the romantic Chateaubriand with his "Genie de Christianisme," Lebensohn thought he had proven with his "Faith and Knowledge" the preference of faith over knowledge and the value of the former for life. What he did prove with this poem, however, was that a poet of great promise was arising in Hebrew literature,—a promise that was, alas, not destined to be fulfilled, as Lebensohn died at the age of twenty-four. For, in spite of the tendency of the poem, and in spite, again, of a certain conventionality of phraseology—the mosaic Biblical style,—and the somewhat conventional stanza—the four-stress quatrain with alternate rime,— in spite of all this,

the poem is truly noble, manifesting poetic fire, idyllic beauty, and vividness of erotic emotion which remind one of Keats, with whom, in fact, Lebensohn had much in common.

The other long poems of Lebensohn do not rise to the height of "Faith and Knowledge," although there are some fine lyric touches in all of them. Yet, the psychologic struggle, in the poem "Joel and Sisera," between the duty of Joel as hostess to Sisera and the love for her people, is superbly depicted.

The shorter poems of Lebensohn deal generally with personal emotion and sentiment, such as love, appreciation of nature blended with religious reflections, and hope or despair engendered by his own sickly condition. But there are also to be found some poems of more general and non-personal import, among which may be counted "To the Stars," perhaps the most beautiful of his shorter poems, where he hurls a complaint to the stars against the misery and corruption of our world. The tone of his poems, however, is, in general, by no means pessimistic; on the contrary, the poet clings to life with all the tenacity of which a consumptive is capable. He grasps at the pleasures of life, delights in the beauties of nature, writes very pretty playful little poems on the subject of love; but, at the same time, with the clear consciousness of the chill iron grip of death upon him, he curses the spell that the love of this world has cast upon him:

> "Cursed be the love of life forever!
> Most woful pang of all human sorrow!
> Soul from body it suffers not to sever,
> Whisp'ring hopes delusive for the morrow."

In brief, Lebensohn was no innovator as regards poetic form, style or meter; but, with respect to intrinsic value, he was the first great poet in modern Hebrew literature. He was inspired by what is noblest in man and nature, and, in his turn, served as an inspiration to future Hebrew poets.

There were at that time also a number of versifiers, the most noted of whom was E. M. Werbel, who wrote a few original

poems and made some translations from European literature. The poetic value of Werbel's works is, however, slight. His most important poem, "Edim Neëmanim," is a narrative based upon the known Talmudic legend of the rat and the well, which were taken as witnesses to an oath of constancy between two lovers accidentally meeting in the wilderness, and which avenged the breaking of the pledge. The subject is, to be sure, romantic enough, and in the hands of a true poet it might have become a real epic; but Werbel could not rise above a dry, though smooth, telling of facts.

The romantic *par excellence* was, however, Abraham Mapu (1808–67), who was also the creator of the Hebrew novel. Mapu was born in a small town in Russia and received an education in accordance with traditional Judaism, devoting himself, in particular, to the study of the Talmud. Being, however, of a dreamy nature, he did not find sufficient spiritual food in the dry laws and dialectics of the Halachic part of the Talmud, but was always attracted by the Agadic part, with its fanciful stories and legends. The emotional religious fervor of Hasidism, too, had great fascination for him, and he became attached to it for a time. As for the Kabbalah, its temptation for him lay in its mysteries, which he not only studied deeply, but even attempted to translate into practice.

With the secular world of letters he became acquainted by mere chance. He accidentally happened upon a Latin version of the Bible, from which he studied that classic tongue, by aid of the Hebrew text; and when he later became proficient in this language and began to study its literature, a new world was opened before him, into which he threw himself with all the plasticity and impressibility of his mind. Thenceforth he took up Russian, German, and French, drinking deep draughts at the fountains of their literatures. And the influence of these literatures was in accord with his temperament. For, with a nature such as his, mild, timid, dreamy, and impressible, he could not but fall under the influence of the fantastic novels of a

Eugene Sue rather than of the matter-of-fact stories of a Balzac. Add to this, moreover, the circumstances under which he lived: his being confined to the stifling atmosphere of the Talmudic academy, and to the narrow limits of a small town, with its monotonous, stagnant life,—and it will readily be understood why his creative powers sought an outlet in the romantic, distant past rather than in the petty, uninteresting present of his surroundings.

The literary heritage of Mapu is not large: four novels in all, only three of which are extant. Of the fourth we have but a fragment, the rest having been destroyed in manuscript, through the machinations of his conservative adversaries. Three of these novels deal with historic subjects and one with modern life. "Ahabath Zion" (The Love of Zion) was the first work produced by him. It deals with the times of the prophet Isaiah and of the kings Ahaz and Hezekaiah. Mapu began to write it in 1831, but, in his timidity in the face of so great an innovation as the introduction of a new literary species, the novel, into Hebrew literature, he withheld it from the public till 1853. About that time, a bolder spirit, Kalman Schulman, a quasi romantic, published, with great success, a translation of Eugene Sue's "Mysteries of Paris;" and this daring feat encouraged Mapu to produce his own innovation.

"Ahabath Zion" created a sensation with the Hebrew reading public,—a sensation due, to be sure, not so much to the literary value of the book as to the novelty of the enterprise. For, regarded from the artistic point of view, this novel—and for that matter, all Mapu's novels—has very great defects. There is, for example, no attempt at character drawing. His heroes are not individualities; nor do they even represent types. They are simply idealizations, the offspring of the author's fancy: gentle, kind, of dove-like sweetness and angelic beauty; in short, embodiments of virtue and loveliness. Their activities are wholly determined by external circumstances. They themselves are endowed with all the weakness and timidity of the author, are at times rather cowardly, afraid to run in the face of Providence or

of society, and prone to seek their ends through intrigue rather than through an open display of courage. In one respect, however, Mapu's heroes are Homeric, in that they are ever ready to weep, whether the occasion call for tears or not.

All this is generally true of Mapu's virtuous heroes. His villains—ordinarily as misshapen in body as in soul—do show some individuality and strength of character. This fact manifests more than anything else the influence of the French romantic novelists of the Eugene Sue type, in whose novels, as in those of Mapu, we admire the rogues more than the namby-pamby, washed-out heroes. Take, for example, Reumah, one of the characters in Mapu's second historical novel, "Ashmath-Shomeron" (The Guilt of Samaria), a sort of depraved Joan of Arc, of the kingdom of Ephraim, who is the daughter of a profligate mother and of Zichri, "the hero of Ephraim," the prototype of the cruel, corrupt mediæval robber-knight. The author designed to embody in this heroine the cruelty of her father as well as the depravity of her mother. Yet, Reumah is not entirely unsympathetic. It is true that she is the rallying point of the wild orgies in Ephraim; but she is, at the same time, the object of inspiration for the Ephraimitish young men in honest warfare, and though violent in love, she is constant. Similarly Mapu's other rogues, though more villainous than the one described above, are imposing at least with their strenuous wickedness.

The native powers of Mapu, then, lie not in character drawing, but rather in his plot and in the charm of his story telling. This charm arises from a naivity, from an innocent, firm belief in the final victory of good over evil,—and in it, as well as in a successful imitation of the picturesqueness, though not of the strength, of the Isaianic style, lies his success. All this is particularly true of the first novel of Mapu, "Ahabath Zion." Here, the plot is simple and smooth, and it runs swiftly along, carrying the interest of the reader with it. Yet, even in this story there are some unfilled gaps and a number of questionable knots in the weaving of the plot. This defect is still more apparent in his

longer novels: "Ashmath Shomeron" (two parts) and "Ayit Zabua" (five parts). Here, especially in the latter, the thread of the story is much more of a tangle than in "Ahabath Zion." The intricacies of the plot, though skillfully formed, are rather hard to follow; and the same is true of their unravelling in the denouement,—where the discrepancies are more apparent in these two novels than in his first book. Some unnecessary incidents are conjured up for no other reason apparently than to lend more complication to the incidents, and interstices are often left open, because the heroes do not possess the strength to carry their decisions into action. Mapu, in his romantic zeal, moreover, sometimes overdraws the situation. Placing the scenes of activity of his first two novels in Palestine, during the decadence of the northern kingdom, Ephraim, he contrasts the life of the Judeans with that of the Ephraimites, painting the former in the most ideal and the latter in the darkest colors. Zion, or, more specifically, Jerusalem, is for Mapu an enchanted Camelot, where the people, at least, the aristocracy, are knights *sans peur et sans reproche;* and if there chance to be a plotter or rogue among them, he generally hails from Samaria. Ephraim, on the other hand, is represented in all that drunkenness and vile corruption, against which the prophet Isaiah launches his most effective denunciations.

The tendencies and ideas represented in Mapu's novels are rather conservative. The heroes are usually born into the aristocracy—the nobility or the money-aristocracy,—with whom he sympathizes more than with the masses. In general, his romanticism is not of the revolutionary, Byronic, type. Neither is it pessimistic of the type of Leopardi, or mystical of the German type. He was too gentle for the first kind and too much of a modern Jew for the other two,—his indulgence in the Kabbalah being merely a youthful vagary. His was rather a romanticism of the type of the "Lake School" poets: dreamy, idyllic, quietistic,—indulging in the vague rather than in the mystic. To these characteristics is due the fact that Mapu's heroes always yearn for the quiet to be found in the bosom of

nature. This longing stands in sharp contrast to the stirring incidents and vicissitudes which they undergo,—incidents in which, it is true, they play rather a passive part. It is natural, therefore, that we find in his novels some fine romantic descriptions of nature, coupled with praise and admiration for idyllic life.

These characteristics are, to a greater or lesser degree, true of all Mapu's novels. In "Ayit Zabua" (The Painted Hawk), however, a story of modern life, we find ourselves in a different atmosphere from that of his other two novels, aside from the fact that the latter represent a different mode of life. The publication of "Ayit Zabua" falls in a new period in the life of eastern Jewry and Hebrew literature,—a period that will be dealt with at length in a future chapter. Here, it may be said in brief, that the tendencies of the new period were those of the Haskalah movement in its second stage. At that time the demand for religious reforms became loud and the struggle acute between old beliefs and a modern interpretation of religion. And these tendencies are reflected in Mapu's novel of modern times, "Ayit Zabua." Traces of this conflict may be found, to be sure, even in his historic novels. Zimri, in "Ahabath Zion," for example, is a type of hypocrite later developed by Mapu in Rabbi Zadok, the villain of "Ayit Zabua," and the false Ephraimite prophet in "Ashmath Shomeron" is an earlier version of the wonder-worker of the nineteenth century. But it is in "Ayit Zabua" that we find ourselves right in the midst of the struggle. Upon religious reforms as such, Mapu, indeed, touches only off-handedly; but the atmosphere of the novel is militant. The hypocrites, that is to say, the extreme orthodox, are arrayed in battle against the enlightened, the Maskilim, the religious reformers,—with the natural result—natural from the point of view of Mapu—that the latter ultimately carry off the victory.

Such is Mapu the romantic and the father of the Hebrew novel. He is no creator of character; nor is his plot flawless. His success lies in the charm of his story telling rather than in the logical sequence of events. By dint of this and by his successful

application of Biblical phraseology to his subject, he exerted considerable influence upon the further development of Hebrew literature; and by reason of this charm his "Ahabath Zion" became a classic read with delight by old and young even in our own time.

CHAPTER II

THE SECOND STAGE OF THE HASKALAH MOVEMENT

1. The Movement; the Newspaper and the Magazine

The romantic movement in Hebrew literature, for the reasons given above, was incidental and of short duration. Besides the two representatives discussed in the preceding chapter, very few writers tried their hand at the romantic poem or story. Thenceforth, from about 1860 to 1880, roughly speaking, Hebrew literature resumed its old Haskalah tradition, though on a divergent line, subjecting to its tendencies the newly acquired literary domain, the novel, as well as the poem and the newspaper.

What was the new departure in the Haskalah movement? In its first stage the sentiment of the Maskilim had, to a great extent, been purely educational. The Haskalah had concerned itself with the mind rather than with the life of the Jew. It had been an idea, not a passion. Now, all this was changed. The Haskalah movement became a passionate advocate in behalf of Jewish life and Jewish reality. Moreover,—and this was the main feature of the new stage of the movement—the attitude towards Jewish religion, which before had been conciliatory, now became threatening. Demands were put forward for religious reforms, such as it was impossible for the orthodox Jew to grant. A conflict was, therefore, inevitable.

The cause of this new drift in the movement is to be sought not so much in the inherent character of the latter as in the new influence by which it was now swayed. Previously—since the Haskalah originally hailed from Berlin—it had stood under the influence of German literature, where the opposition to the existing social, religious, and political institutions had not been so pronounced as in later Russian literature. Now, however, it was the turn of the latter to bring some of its ideas to bear upon the Haskalah and Hebrew literature. The greatest impulse to the introduction of Russian ideas into the Pale was given by

the educational opportunities offered to the Jews by Alexander II. Some endeavors in this direction had indeed been made by Nicholas I, who had established secular schools for the Jews in many large centers. But, as these efforts on his part had been in glaring contrast to his political attitude towards the Jews, they had not met with success, being regarded with suspicion as an expression of sinister intentions. Yet, the way had been prepared; and when the more magnanimous Alexander II threw open the doors of the high schools and the universities to the Jewish people, the latter took ample advantage of this liberality and flocked thither with that fervidness and thirst for knowledge, which have always been characteristic of the race. In this manner, the Jews came into closer contact with Russian life, Russian culture, Russian ideas and literature. What wonder, therefore, that Russian influences now began to assert themselves in Hebrew life and letters?

What was the condition of Russian literature at that time? Russia had just passed through a period of literary reaction, which had ended with the death of Nicholas I, and was striking out in an entirely different direction. Writers such as Herzen, Pisarev, Dobrolubov, Tschernishefsky, Turgeniev, Dostoyevsky (in his first years), and Tolstoy were laying their impress upon it and were leading it on the path of radicalism. And this radicalism did not express itself in mere revolutionary ideas. It was—particularly in the case of the critics Pisarev and Tschernishefsky—of a coarser fibre. It constituted what is popularly known as nihilism and became, from the point of view of literature, a gross materialism, which discouraged poetic activities and which esteemed, let us say, Büchner's "Force and Matter" far above the creations of a Poushkin.

Among the Russians themselves, this spirit penetrated every phase of life: social, religious, and political. It is true that political conditions were of a nature such as to curb any open attack upon the established order; but the revolutionary spirit asserted itself in spite of all restraint and persecution, cropping out through every crevice and cranny in life and in literature.

When its influence reached the Jewish Pale, however, it found but one native element which it could combat and upon which it could force reforms—religion. For, as the political and economic, and, in a measure, even the social, life of the Jews was being created for them by an external force, to fight against which within the enclosures of the Ghetto would have been like trying to sail on dry land, there remained only the religious life that was of their own making and that they could fashion at their will. Moreover, the whole matter rested upon a somewhat mistaken conception of Judaism. For, at that time, Judaism was not yet variedly interpreted and differentiated, into nationalism and religion, two factors working independently of each other, but was confined within the circumscribed limits of religion, with which Jewish life and Jewish reality were inseparably connected. Reforms in Jewish religion, therefore, meant for the radical reforms in Jewish life. And more than this. The Maskil, the Jewish liberal, labored under the false assumption that it was the Jewish customs, the religious beliefs or misbeliefs, which stood as a barrier between the Jew and the non-Jew, between the Jew and his own happiness. Hence the zeal of the Maskil for religious reforms.

This religious struggle was taken up particularly by the Hebrew wing of the Maskilim, the Hebrew writers and their adherents, those who had enjoyed a more or less thorough Hebrew education. The Russo-Jewish wing, the professionals, the graduates of Russian universities, had another mission before them,—supplementary to that of the Hebrew wing: to present a bold front to the external enemy and to rouse public opinion against Jewish disabilities, for which purpose they established Russo-Jewish newspapers and created a considerable Russo-Jewish literature. Now and then, to be sure, there would take place, on their part too, some skirmishing in behalf of religious reforms; but this would happen rather in order to pay tribute to the spirit of the time than as a matter of real necessity,—for the Russo-Jewish readers had long before departed from traditional Judaism, in the strict sense of the word.

This zeal for religious reform evinced by the intellectuals was, however, by no means shared by the masses. In the first place, both the Hebrew and the Russo-Jewish wings spoke in languages not understood by the people at large. Then, again, their tendencies were of too negative a character to be attractive to the latter; for though they were of service to Judaism by curbing superstition and making a breach in the Ghetto wall to admit some fresh air from without, yet they did not offer the key they had promised to the solution of the Jewish problem. The Maskilim, therefore, did not get a large following from among the masses; but, on the contrary, provoked their antagonism. As a consequence, Jewish society was divided into two antagonistic camps. There were, on the one hand, the Maskilim, who formed the Jewish aristocracy, distinguished from the masses both in outward appearance and in psychology, vain, superficial, rationalistic in ideas and often loose in morals, inclined towards assimilation; idealistic and with missionary zeal in their youthful days, but cynical, selfish, indifferent to Jewish affairs—an indifference tantamount at times to actual Jew-hatred—when youthful idealism had evaporated. On the other hand, there was the bulk of the Jewish people, clinging to ancient traditions, fanatic, superstitious, opposed to any innovation, looking at the Maskilim with suspicion, and persecuting them whenever possible.

This was the atmosphere that surrounded Hebrew literature, and these were the influences and tendencies by which it was swayed during the second stage of the Haskalah period.

Under these circumstances, when Hebrew literature was getting a hold upon Jewish life and Jewish reality, it was natural for the newspaper and the magazine to begin playing a role in Hebrew literature, gradually occupying the place of the quasi-scientific, quasi-literary magazine of the first stage of the Haskalah period. Thus in 1856 there was established the first Hebrew weekly, "Ha-Maggid." Its place of publication, it is true, was Lyck, Austria; but it was merely a literary makeshift on the part of Silberman, the editor, who, though a Russian Maskil, established

the newspaper abroad, because of the difficulties met with in Russia in a new undertaking of the kind. He counted, however, upon Russian Jewry as his main support, and the Maskilim of that country, on their part, regarded the "Ha-Maggid" as their own organ.

The standard of the Ha-Maggid, both as a newspaper and as a literary magazine, was by no means high. Silberman himself was a mere literary upstart, who had neither the knowledge nor the literary ability for the undertaking. And these defects were stamped upon the features of the newspaper. It hardly offered a trace of the "leader," or editorial, in its columns; it took up no live topic to discuss,—and it never uttered a cry of revolt against the grinding oppression of the Jews in Russia or elsewhere. Its main features as a newspaper were the items of news and correspondences. Otherwise, its contents were similar to those of the magazine of the previous period: poems of occasion, notes on Biblical exegesis, and quasi-scientific treatises. Moreover, the Hebrew style of the "Ha-Maggid" was generally cramped, stilted, and ungrammatical. Yet the paper was received by the Maskilim with enthusiasm, for it was, after all, the first newspaper in Hebrew; and, as Silberman possessed the energy and force of will to continue its publication under conditions however unfavorable, there gradually rallied about him some of the ablest writers of the time, who finally succeeded in giving it the semblance of a real newspaper.

The "Ha-Maggid" published abroad could, however, not for long satisfy the demands of the Russian Hebraists, among whom life was becoming tenser and more effervescent. Accordingly, there sprang up, during 1860–62, three Hebrew weeklies in Russia itself: "Ha-Karmel," "Ha-Zefirah," and "Ha-Meliz." The "Ha-Karmel," published in Wilna, "the Lithuanian Jerusalem," which was then a nest of the Maskilim of the older stamp, was edited by Samuel Joseph Fuenn. Fuenn was a Maecenas of Hebrew literature, a well known scholar and the author of several works, the most important of which are: "Ha-Ozar" (1884), an encyclopedic Hebrew dictionary, and a history of the Jews,

in two volumes, the spirit of which is traditional-rationalistic and the arrangement a medley. The "Ha-Karmel" was an improvement upon the "Ha-Maggid." Its Hebrew was more correct, the news more interesting, and the material more tastefully arranged; yet as a newspaper it did not stand on a much higher plane than the latter.

Nor did the "Ha-Zefirah" rise to a much higher level. This weekly was established in Warsaw, in 1862, by H. S. Slonimsky. It was discontinued after an existence of some six months, reappeared in Berlin twelve years later and from there was transferred back to Warsaw. Slonimsky was less of a Hebrew scholar than Fuenn; but, on the other hand, he was a mathematician and an astronomer of originality and inventiveness, who was famed as such not only in Hebrew circles, but also in the non-Jewish world. Accordingly, the "Ha-Zefirah," while under his editorship (1862–80), became a popular scientific newspaper,—but not much more.

All these weeklies, though distinctly to be classed among the products of the new phase of the Haskalah period, still represented in essence the spirit of the old stage. Neither the disheartening relation of the outside world to the Jewish people, nor the internal religious conflict that was just arising in Jewry, were reflected, to a sufficient extent, in these newspapers. The first Hebrew weekly that really approached the standard of a modern newspaper and, at the same time, represented the spirit of the age of the Haskalah, was the "Ha-Meliz," established in 1860 in Odessa, by Alexander Zederbaum and Goldenblum. The former, who was the editor in chief, was neither a Hebrew scholar like Fuenn nor a man of science like Slonimsky; but he was more a man of the world than either, and was, besides, endowed with marked energy, good common sense, and earnestness of purpose. With these qualities he not only succeeded in making the "Ha-Meliz" a respectable newspaper, expressing the spirit of that age, but he was versatile enough to grasp the new situation brought about, after 1880, by the revival period—to be treated in a subsequent chapter—in Russian Jewry, and make his newspaper the organ of the new movement.

As to the tendency of the "Ha-Meliz," its title is indicative enough and likewise characteristic of the age: "The Ha-Meliz (interpreter) between the People and the Government and between Religion and Enlightenment." And the newspaper really carried out its program. "An intermediary between religion and enlightenment,"—that was really a euphemism for "partisan of religious reforms." Hence it became the center of the Haskalah conflict. As for it becoming an interpreter between the Jewish people and the government, its attitude towards the latter was much more flattering than towards the former. And for good reason. The Maskilim believed that the educational opportunities then granted to the Jews in Russia were the beginnings of their ultimate emancipation. Hence, the policy of being "quieter than water and lower than grass"—as the Russian saying goes—that the Jewish press of the time assumed in respect to Jewish oppression, and hence the flattering, nay the fawning, attitude towards the government.

Besides these weeklies, there were also a few Hebrew monthlies, which embraced the cause of the Haskalah. "He-Haluz" (1866–1889) was edited by J. H. Shorr. Being a Galician Jew, the editor was loyal to the traditions of the Maskilim of his country, the creators of the so-called "Jewish Science," in that he allotted a liberal space in his magazine to this "Hokmath Yisrael." He outstripped them, however, in historic investigation; for, whereas they handled the Scriptures and other sacred books with all deference and veneration, he, on the contrary, introduced higher Biblical and Talmudic criticism into the Hebrew, a thing unheard of until then in that literature. He engaged in this criticism, however, not merely with the intention of furthering science, but also with a view to religious reform, contributing his share to the latter by the verve and gusto with which he attacked his subject as well as by his merciless overhauling of the sacred texts.

"The Ha-Shahar," another and more successful monthly, was edited and published in Vienna during the years 1876–88, by

Perez Smolenskin. Around this magazine there rallied a group of the ablest writers of the age, bearing aloft the standard of the Haskalah,—writers such as the philosophico-scientific Solomon Rubin, the greatest Hebrew poet of the time, Judah Loeb Gordon, the short story writer, M. D. Brandstaedter, the publicist, M. L. Lilienblum, and the like. These men came, each with his peculiar Haskalah weapon, to launch attack after attack upon superstition and ultra-orthodoxy. The "Ha-Shahar" thus became the oracle of the Maskilim, eclipsing in influence all the other Hebrew newspapers and magazines of the time.

The "Ha-Shahar" was, however, not merely a Haskalah periodical. Its collaborators, it is true, were given a free hand to preach a revision of the religious customs and laws, but the editor, Smolenskin, himself had a more positive ideal to impart to his readers. He was a person of fiery temperament, thorough idealism, and indomitable energy, and, besides, he possessed, to an extent unequalled among the other writers, a passionate devotion to his people and to Hebrew literature. And all this was mirrored in the "Ha-Shahar." In this periodical the editor surprised the Maskilim by denouncing the Haskalah that hailed from Berlin, particularly that phase of it which, consciously or unconsciously, countenanced assimilation. He, moreover, carried on a vigorous propaganda for Jewish nationalism, the revival of Hebrew, and, later, for the rehabilitation of Palestine. These characteristics mark both Smolenskin and the "Ha-Shahar" as forerunners of the revival period in Jewry, by dint of which they exerted a tremendous influence on Hebrew literature.

Partly in zeal for the Berlin Haskalah, but mainly, it seems, from more personal motives, Gottlober, a versifier greatly admired in his day, established the monthly "Ha-Boker Or" (1876–86), in opposition to the "Ha-Shahar." The "Ha-Boker Or" displayed neither the critical acumen of the "He-Haluz" nor the fire and earnestness of the "Ha-Shahar." It succeeded, however, in gathering about itself a group of able writers, admirers, and adherents, and it exerted some influence upon its generation.

CHAPTER III

FICTION DURING THE SECOND STAGE OF THE HASKALAH PERIOD; LITERARY CRITICISM

1. The Novel and the Short Story

The Haskalah novel proper really begins with "Ayit Zabua" (1860), a story by A. Mapu. The creator of the Hebrew novel was also the first to introduce into it the Haskalah conflict. The story form for Haskalah purposes was, however, employed before that time by Isaac Erter (1792–1851), a Galician physician. Erter wrote a few combative essays in the form of fantastic stories, which were collected after his death and republished in one volume under the title "Ha-Zofeh LeBeth Yisrael" (1858). The historic relation of the "Ha-Zofeh," or, rather, the various stories in it, to the Hebrew novel is similar to that of "Sir Roger de Coverley" to the English novel, with this difference that the "Ha-Zofeh" is more fantastic than "Sir Roger." "Gilgul Nefesh" may serve as the most illustrative example of the book. It is the autobiography of a soul in process of transmigration for several hundred years, and is a criticism of every phase of Jewish public life, particularly the life and institutions of the Hasidim, those scapegoats of the Haskalah literature. The spirit is here rationalistic of the Voltairian kind, and there is no appreciation of the poetry and the deeper religious sentiment of Hasidism. But the humor is exquisite and the description of the various transitions of the soul from body to body, human and beastly alternately, shows art and imagination. The reception accorded the "Ha-Zafeh" was indeed so favorable, that it was eventually canonized among the classics of Hebrew literature.

To return to Mapu's "Painted Hawk." It may here be added, to the account given of it in the first chapter, that in this story are found the faults of Mapu's historic novels without their merits. In the "Painted Hawk," the Biblical inspiration, for which Mapu was so well adapted by his gentle and romantic nature, was no longer at work. He now had to draw largely upon

his own resources; and as there was an inherent weakness and helplessness about his personality, he imparted these temperamental defects to his heroes and to the story as a whole. The plot, though developed rather skillfully, is not marked by any action worthy of the name; and in the end the situation is saved by a *deus ex machina* in the form of a rich uncle, who bequeathes to his heroes a goodly sum, sufficient to live "happily for ever after." And for all these faults we are no longer compensated by the Biblical charm which generally radiates from Mapu's other works. Furthermore, even his Hebrew style loses in this novel a great deal of its beauty. Dealing with a modern subject, the author makes an attempt at modernizing also his style, employing, though very sparingly, some neo-Hebraic terms and expressions,—with the result that his Hebrew forfeits much of its pristine picturesqueness, without gaining in precision.

On the same level with "Ayit Zabua" (The Painted Hawk), we may place "Ha-Aboth WeHa-Banim" (Fathers and Children, 1868), by S. J. Abramovitz. The title was probably suggested by Turgeniev's novel of the same name, with which, however, it has nothing in common, except that in both novels there is portrayed the difference between the old generation and the new. This story does not as yet betray the genius of the author, Abramovitz, who was later to become the great story writer of the Yiddish and Hebrew literatures. It lacks the broad human sympathies that we find in his later works. The atmosphere is entirely that of the Haskalah: the old generation, the pious, is foolish and brutish; the young generation, the representative of the Haskalah views and tendencies, is idealized and painted in glowing colors. The style of this novel is still that of the age of the Haskalah. There is no trace of the exuberance, the suggestiveness, and the humor—due to stylistic combination—that are to be found in his later works, but use is still made of the conventional Melizah, or mosaic style characteristic of the period. Yet, even in this story, we find, now and then, a Hebraized Yiddish colloquialism, a conceit that he later developed very successfully. There is, moreover, an attempt at

observation and description of nature, a thing sadly wanting in most of the other Haskalah works. In one more particular, however, Abramovitz here distinguishes himself from the other Maskilim: they were generally aristocratic in their inclinations; he extends his sympathies towards the uneducated masses. He believes that they should be provided with works presenting their own humble life and written in their own language, Yiddish. Abramovitz, therefore, suiting his action to his words, soon abandoned Hebrew for Yiddish literature, returning to the former only after it had acquired some measure of popularity among the masses.

These novels, and a few others of the kind, were, however, merely transitional. They represented, it is true, the Haskalah tendencies; but the Haskalah conflict with religion was not yet so clearly pronounced in them. This conflict attained its fullest expression in the novel "Ha-Dath WeHa-Hayyim" (Religion and Life, 1876), by R. A. Braudes. According to the original plan of the author, the story was to consist of five parts, but only three of these were ever published. Of these three parts, the first two alone are important for our purpose, having been written during the most exciting days of the Haskalah. In this work all the combustible material of the conflict was gathered together and set ablaze, and in it all the faults and the merits of the period can be discovered. Yet the story has some praiseworthy features of its own.

To a Jew of our own age, to whom religion has become a matter of mere personal belief, which does not interfere with his communal interests, the motive of "Ha-Dath WeHa-Hayyim" would seem flimsy enough; but at that time, the questions this author raised were of vital importance, at least, so they seemed to the Maskilim. These questions hinge upon the minutiae of the Jewish Law. The author, it is true, is leading up, in the course of the story, to more essential religious issues; but the novel breaks off before reaching the more interesting struggle, probably by reason of the inability of the author to cope with a more strenuous situation.

With all this, however, there is certainly a great advance in this novel over, say, Mapu's "Painted Hawk," both in construction and in characterization. Though incident and tendency are welded together, yet the plot is by no means flimsy, as one would expect in a novel of purpose,—both elements being harmoniously proportional. The plot is smooth, rational, and carries one along agreeably. In characterization, it is true, the novel is not so felicitous. The chief hero, Samuel, despite the author's assurance that he is the future Jewish Luther, is not quite convincing. Neither is he strong enough nor has he knowledge enough for an intellectual religious reformer. Yet, even he presents some fine psychologic moments. Witness, for example, the militant scene in the synagog, between Samuel and the Rabbi, when the former suddenly breaks down on hearing the Rabbi's decision no longer to admit him to his house, which for Samuel meant a separation between him and his beloved, the stepdaughter of the Rabbi. Or, again, notice the internal struggle that Samuel experiences at the discovery that this same sweetheart of his is a matter-of-fact, materialistic girl, who has no sympathy with his reform tendencies,—and then his final rejection of her. It is to be remarked that Braudes always brings about a separation between two lovers whose affection depends more upon externals than upon affinity of soul, though, curiously enough, he argues both by word and by example, that it is possible for two people to be close friends, even though they widely differ in temperament as well as in ideas.

If Braudes did not depict a really great hero in Samuel, he rose, on the other hand, to some artistic height in his minor characters. Take, for example, the Talmudic student, "The Birzian," with his fickleness and his numerous amours, who ridicules Samuel for the depth of his love, but who finally himself falls a victim to a serious love affair. Then, again, there is the old-fashioned schoolmaster, with his constantly exposed chest and uncouth manners, whose open-heartedness, passionate and pedantic seeking after truth, and tribulation of mind at finding himself influenced by Samuel's eloquent appeal for religious

reforms, lend him an individuality such as Braudes has seldom, if ever, succeeded in bestowing upon any of his other characters. These and a few more minor characters are worthy of the pen of a great master.

All this is true of the first two parts of the novel. The third part, written several years later, during the twilight of the Haskalah period, bears a relation to them akin to that borne by the second part of Faust to the first. It gives the impression of an afterthought. In the first two parts there is atmosphere, fervor, movement; there is very little of all this in the third. Here, the plot is shaky, the movement imperceptible, and the chief hero, Samuel, is settling down to the life of an inactive lover. He becomes the sedate school teacher of a small town, with a touch of vague Socialistic tendencies about him. In short, when we speak of "Ha-Dath WeHa-Hayyim" and its place in Hebrew literature, we mean merely the first two parts of the novel.

Braudes wrote several other stories, some of which are almost as important from the literary-historic point of view as his "Ha-Dath WeHa-Hayyim," though artistically they are inferior to the latter. Two of these novels are to be mentioned in this place as representing two stages in the history of Hebrew literature different from the Haskalah period: "The Extremes" (1886) and "Whence and Whither" (1891). The former pictures two contrasting phases of Jewish life, that of the large city, with its hollowness and polished superficialities, and that of the small country town, rugged and uncouth externally, but serene in its quietude, sincere in piety, and pure in family life. The gist of the story is as follows: an inhabitant of a small town, Hezron, a Hasid of poetic temperament, a husband and father, comes to Odessa and is immediately charmed by its life and superficial splendor, including a pretty girl of rather colorless character, in whose meshes he becomes entangled. This girl's brother, who is somewhat of a rake, and who has enjoyed the life of the large city to satiety and is now tired of it, makes his abode, for a time, in the very town from which his sister's lover

hails, and is enchanted by the primitive qualities of the place, plus the charms of an innocent beautiful country girl, the sister-in-law of Hezron.

The plot, as may easily be seen, is a tangle engendered in the mind of the author rather than a mesh of incidents woven by the fates. It is true, that, given the atmosphere of "The Extremes," people might act in a manner similar to that of the heroes in this novel; but the plot as a whole gives one the impression of being forced. In the denouement the author does rise to some psychologic height, especially while extricating the two main heroes from their difficulties. But, whereas a great master would here have found scope for a pure tragedy or comedy, Braudes introduces a *deus ex machina* in the person of a grandfather, who cuts the Gordian knot and brings about a final disentanglement. As to characterization, there is hardly any worthy of the name. The heroes and heroines are colorless, weak, helpless, and weepers to the extent of making the story a *comedie larmoyante.*

The artistic significance of "The Extremes" is thus not great. Its importance lies, however, in the fact that it presents a new phase in Hebrew literature,—the transition from the Haskalah to a more modern period. The atmosphere is entirely different from that of "Ha-Dath WeHa-Hayyim," and the two extremes depicted in this story are not simply the life of the city as contrasted with that of the country. It is the life of Odessa, worldly and empty of Jewish ideals, set over against that of a small Volhynian town, the habitat of Hasidism, with its glowing fancy and fanaticism. And, then, the reconciliation of the two extremes through the mediation of the grandfather hailing from Wilna, the "Lithuanian Jerusalem," the abode of Haskalah,—as modified by Braudes to suit the purpose of his story—which unites in itself both worldly wisdom and Jewish learning. The novel thus bears a somewhat symbolic character, suggesting the possibility of a conciliation between worldliness and Jewish religiosity, provided both relax somewhat of their rigor.

With all this, however, the significance of "The Extremes" is

not exhausted. Two more features may be pointed out as enhancing its value as a transition novel: the endeavor of the author at a greater precision of style, and his sympathy with the life of the Hasidim,—a sympathy that assumed much greater proportions in later Hebrew literature.

Braudes' other novel above mentioned, "Whence and Whither," was written during the period of the national revival, its subject matter being taken from that period. The story remained unfinished, and is only illustrative of the inability of Braudes to treat a positive movement.

The significance of the productions of Braudes, then, was not great. His creative powers were limited, at times unequal to the task in hand, failing here and there to give a finishing touch to character, and now and then leaving the work little more than a torso. The individual, moreover, was not freed in his stories from serfdom to society and social ideals. Yet the novels of Braudes have the merit of reflecting the conflicts and ambitions of a whole period, as well as of showing some advance as regards precision of style, coördination of incident, and improvement in characterization.

Contemporaneously with Braudes, there appeared in Hebrew literature a short story writer of some talent, M. Brandstaedter (b. 1844). Brandstaedter was a prominent Galician manufacturer, who wrote occasionally, and published only one volume of sketches during the Haskalah period. He began his literary career—if the case of a merchant dallying with literature may be called a career—in 1869, the same year in which Smolenskin founded the "Ha-Shahar," in which most of Brandstaedter's sketches were published. He stood under the irresistible influence of Smolenskin, for which reason he should by rights be classed among the writers of the transition period, were it not for the fact that he presented no positive tendency, and that he was still infused, to a great extent, with the spirit of the Haskalah.

Brandstaedter's works were admired in their time as the most successful short stories in Hebrew. Even the modern reader

will find in them some verve, a fine vein of humor, and a certain mastery of technique. It would be in vain, however, to look in his stories for any sort of characterization. In this respect, he was entirely the child of the Haskalah age, for which the problem was the main issue. And to the credit of Brandstaedter be it said that the problem for him was not merely religious reform. In his sketches he ridicules not only the Hasidim, but also the superficial lustre of the Haskalah,—of that Haskalah which consists in teaching the children to prate a few words of French, to despise everything Jewish, and to affect an air of romance borrowed from the French novel. The following scene, from one of his sketches, may serve as an illustration of the manner in which he satirized the superficiality and affectation resulting from this sort of education:

"Simon (a coxcomb and empty-headed fellow) met Miriam (a flirt and a light-minded girl) walking in the garden. He greeted her, looked at the ground and sighed.

'Why are you sighing, Sigmund?' Miriam asked in a compassionate tone.

'Because I am not well, because . . . because I am in love.' Miriam did not reply, looked down in her turn, and sighed.

'And why are you sighing?' asked Simon.

'Because I am not well either,' replied Miriam, 'because . . . because I also am in love.'

'And with whom are you in love?' asked Sigmund.

'And with whom are you in love?' asked Miriam.

'Whom should I love . . . ?'

'And whom should I love more than . . . ?' And before Miriam had finished speaking, she found herself in the arms of Simon, and numberless kisses had been exchanged. And all these great and wonderful things occurred in the space of a few short moments."

The result of all this pretension to romance can to some extent be divined from the title of the sketch: "The Beginning and the End of a Quarrel."

It may be remarked, moreover, that some of his other sketches, notably "Sidonia, or a Broken Heart,"—perhaps the best of his stories, rising at times to idyllic beauty—deal, not with the

subject of Hasidism, but with the results of this pseudo Haskalah sort of training. Yet, the greatest number of Brandstaedter's sketches—among which are to be classed his clever but entirely unpoetic narrative verses and the story "Mordecai Kizavitz," the latter forming the basis of his fame—are of a distinctly Haskalah temper. Religious conflict, or, at least, Hasidaic superstition, forms the subject matter of many a sketch; the ideal of a modern rabbi, cherished so much among the Maskilim, is represented in "Mordecai Kizavitz"; and there is to be found even an assimilatory tendency ("Dr. Joseph Alfasi"), which was characteristic, in a greater or lesser degree, of the Maskilim. All this clearly marks Brandstaedter as a writer of the Haskalah age.

There were many other writers who tried their hand at the short story, among them the poets Gordon and Gottlober. The stories of the former are distinguished by their humor, coarse at times, and by their caustic satire. His prose writings were, however, eclipsed by his poetic productions, wherein we find focused, even more than in "Ha-Dath WeHa-Hayyim," the tendencies of the Haskalah.

When we pass in review the achievements of the Haskalah period in the domain of the novel and the story, we find them indeed very attenuated and anemic. We cannot point to any work that rises much above the average, whereas many of the productions sink decidedly below the level of the ordinary. The advance that the Hebrew story had made since the days of romanticism was almost imperceptible: here and there a character—a minor character—was more individualized and set in relief; now and then we may note a gain in technique, or an attempt at modernizing the Hebrew style, in order to adapt it to live purposes. On the other hand, we find a retrogression in the Haskalah story in one important particular: in appreciation of nature. Not one description can be pointed out in the whole range of the novel or story of that age, in which there is any indication of more than a conventional treatment of the world of out-of-doors. And this relative lack of progress, this submerging

of the personal element in the story, can not be laid entirely at the door of the individual writers, but is also due to the spirit of the age. It was a period in which tendency was paramount, and the latter, as always happens in such cases, blighted talent and sacrificed the individual to the social ideal. Braudes, the most talented of the Haskalah novelists, for example, had more mettle than his works, with their lack of finish, might lead one to believe. Had he devoted himself solely to the craft of narrating and not wasted his energies on preaching, we might have had in "Ha-Dath WeHa-Hayyim" a novel as near to perfection as any, and in Braudes himself a master of no mean degree. As it was, his Haskalah tendency killed his art. And this was true not only of the prose writers, but also of the poets of the period.

CHAPTER IV

FICTION DURING THE SECOND STAGE OF THE HASKALAH PERIOD (CONTINUED)

2. POETRY; LITERARY CRITICISM

THE poetic output of the Haskalah period was considerable, both as regards quantity and quality; yet even here the spirit of the age, the withering blight of tendency, was strongly felt. Just as there was no individuality in the novel, so, likewise, there was no personality in the poem. In every branch of poetry, notably lyricism, we perceive a marked decline from the passionate, throbbing, and beauty-loving outbursts of a Micah J. Lebensohn. There is no lack of verve and scathing satire, but there is an absence of real convincing power, of the qualities of durability, of a deeper appreciation of life and its ideals, and of a positive valuation of things. In the militant temper of the time, the personal element is subordinated to the clash and conflict of the social ideals. Hence the relative predominance, at that period, of the drama and the narrative poem, with their lack of emotion and direct presentation of life outside of the individual.

The allegorical drama "Emeth We-Emunah" (Truth and Faith, 1867), by Abraham D. B. Lebensohn (1789–1877), may be regarded as the first poetic endeavor of the kind mentioned above. A. Lebensohn, the father of the poet Micah J. Lebensohn, belonged, by the nature of his lyrics, to the first, the "humanistic," stage of the Haskalah period, being considered its greatest poet. Even in "Emeth We-Emunah" there is a distinct humanistic touch in the desire to wed Faith to Wisdom; for the Maskilim of the second stage of the period were striving for more than this,—they desired to adapt Faith to Life. Yet the future conflict was already foreshadowed in "Emeth We-Emunah," at least in the portrayal of Rabbi Zib'on, meaning allegorically "the painted one," the Tartuffe of Hebrew literature.

"Emeth We-Emunah" was influenced in its setting by the similarly allegorical drama "La-Yesharim Tehillah" of the celebrated M. H. Luzzatto, with this main difference: whereas the *dramatis personae* of the latter represent impersonated virtues and vices as such, those of "Emeth We-Emunah" embody the attributes of Wisdom and Folly: Wisdom, Reason, Truth. The last mentioned is to be married to Belief or Credulity, the daughter of Crowd and Folly—or, rather, Ignorance; but by the intervention of Zib'on the union is foiled. Truth is imprisoned and Falsehood, dressed in Truth's attire, takes his place as the fiance of Faith. Finally, however, Reason comes on the scene, releases Truth, and reinstates him in his office as husband of Faith. Such was the adoration of reason among the Maskilim and such their optimism!

"Emeth We-Emunah" is in some respects inferior, while in others it is superior to "La-Yesharim Tehillah." We miss in it the lyric beauty and the really romantic atmosphere of the latter, as well as its simplicity and warmth of style. Even the echo in the woods,—a dramatic subterfuge—which oracularly foretells future events, imitated from "La-Yesharim Tehillah," sounds more artificial in Lebensohn's drama. Its style, moreover, is more pompous, though generally rather smooth, while, at times, it is marred by excessive punning. "Emeth We-Emunah" has, however, more dramatic effect and less of the *deus ex machina* than "La-Yesharim Tehillah."

"Tifereth Li-Bene Binah" is another allegorical drama, published in the same year as "Emeth We-Emunah" and also influenced by "La-Yesharim Tehillah." The author, A. B. Gottlober (1811–1899), frankly acknowledges the influence. Like "La-Yesharim Tehillah," it is dedicated to the pupil of the author on his wedding day, and like the latter, it has the echo in the woods. The meter, however, is that of another drama of Luzzatto, "Migdal Oz." The *dramatis personae* are: Honor, as king, Glory, his daughter, born to him by his wife Modesty, etc. The quality of this drama, which is not above criticism, bears the same relation to "La-Yesharim Tehillah" as does "Emeth We-Emunah."

Gottlober's poetic and literary activity did not confine itself, however, to this lyrical drama; his productions bear the stamp of three distinct periods in Hebrew literature: the first and second stages of the Haskalah, and the national revival. Gottlober was one of the celebrated poets of his day and was, in a measure, regarded with veneration as the Hebrew Boileau. To us he appears a mediocre versifier, resembling Southey in beating about for a subject and in preferring blank verse as a means of poetic conveyance.

Gottlober made his debut with a very tolerable poem: "Le-Toledoth Ha-Shir WeHa-Melizah," tracing the history of poetry down to modern times and singing its praises in enthusiastic fashion. He soon fell, however, into the banalities of the time (the first stage of Haskalah). He indited poems of occasion, wrote an elegy on the death of Nicholas I—an event that had caused joy throughout the Jewish Pale in Russia,—and cringingly hailed all advances as regards education made by the government towards the Jews, calling upon the latter to awaken and listen to the voice of wisdom—alias Haskalah.

The disposition of Gottlober was far from romantic; and so romanticism passed by without touching him. Soon we find him at the second stage of the Haskalah, in the firing line of the conflict. The greatest part of his literary activity, in poetry as well as in prose, centers in this period; but a marked insincerity pervades all he produced at this time. His national poems written after 1880, under the influence of the national revival, strike, on the other hand, a more sincere and truly poetic note. In one of these poems, "Asire Ha-Tikwah," he confesses, like so many other Maskilim, his disappointment of the aspirations of the preceding age; and now, an old man of seventy, he sees the only hope of his people in Zion. The best poems of this period are "The Bird in the Cage," "The Bird with the Clipped Wings," and "A Voice Is Singing in the Window,"—all pertaining to the neo-national aspirations.

Gottlober also wrote a few stories of no great value and a couple of quasi-scientific works: "Investigations into the Origin of

the Karaites" (1864) and "Kabbalah and Hasidism" (1869),—the former in the rationalistic spirit, and of hardly any scientific value; the latter a polemic and written, of course, from the Haskalah point of view. Besides all this, he edited the monthly "Ha-Boker Or," the nature of which has already been described.

Unlike Gottlober, Jehudah Loeb Lewin (b. 1845), known by his nom-de-plume Yehallel, brought with him a considerable amount of earnestness, fervor, and passion; and had he had a corresponding fluency of style and ease of rhythm, he might have stood in the first rank of the Hebrew poets of the time. Facility of execution was, however, by no means the forte of Lewin. His verse, is generally halting and laborious. In the course of years, it is true, he acquired more skill in the manipulation of the rhythm, so that in some poems, such as "Helpless Wrath" and "The Voice of the Lord," for example, the rhythm is almost in harmony with the solemn subject matter, and in "Of the Songs of Zion," Lewin nearly attains melody. But he hardly ever gets beyond monotony of meter, generally employing the tame, pedestrian hendecasyllabic line, and the conventional sextet stanza of the period.

Monotony is the bane not only of Lewin's meter, but of the substance of his poems as well. Only a few inspired strains are distinguishable in his verse, whether of the Haskalah or of the revival period; and to these few notes he tunes his harp again and again. "Helpless Wrath," in which the poet utters a cry of despair against the present order of society, and "The Voice of the Lord," where he expresses his conviction that Haskalah is the panacea of all human evils, may be cited as his representative Haskalah lyrics; for all the rest of Lewin's lyrical effusions of that period are written in the one or the other vein. And the same is the case with his revival lyrics. The cry of protest against Jewish oppression and the consolation in Zion are the key notes of almost all he produced during that time. His narratives, on the other hand, though lacking imagination, contribute some elements to Hebrew literature that were in a great measure absent in other poems of the kind then written. In "Kishron

Ha-Maase," for example,—the most socialistic[1] of his writings,—the story of a person rising from poverty to opulence and power by the sheer force of will, with the intention of improving humanity, but, by the irony of fate, becoming an oppressor instead of a reformer—we find emotion and psychologic insight; whereas the small narrative poem "Jewish Happiness" shows the humorously pathetic.

Mention must also be made in this connection of a long narrative poem, "Kehal Refaim" (1867), written by the arch Haskalah publicist, Lilienblum. He was by no means a poet by the grace of God, although we have a number of poems from his pen. "Kehal Refaim" is, however, a piece of very clever workmanship. It consists of a series of scenes in the hereafter, where people, who were holding various public offices during their lifetime, come to judgment before the Lord. The characteristic foibles of these notables of Jewish society are delineated in this poem with a spirit and an acuteness representative of the best of the Haskalah period.

The central figure of Haskalah poetry, however, was Judah Loeb Gordon (1831–1892). This poet began his literary career as a romantic, reverting to the ancient or mediaeval world for his material. A number of poems were written by him in this romantic mood, the best known of which is "The Love of David and Michal," a Biblical epic in twelve cantos. Here we see the unmistakable influence of Micah J. Lebensohn; the meter is similar to that of the narratives of the latter—the four stress quatrain with alternate rime— and the style has a romantic flavor. Gordon, however, never attained to the mellowness of style, the deep sentiment, and the romantic sereneness found in Lebensohn. In "Ahavath David U-Michal" we already see the rhetorician and the faultless metrician to come. Otherwise, there is hardly any predominant poetic feature in this twelve canto poem. There is no appreciation of nature, of primeval scenery, such as one would expect from a poem dealing with

[1] It may be remarked that Lewin was one of a group of early Jewish socialists, who began their propaganda in Hebrew.

primitive life. Neither is love the motive power, as one would anticipate of a romantic narrative. Nor are the deeds of David depicted with truly poetic grandeur. With less heaviness of style and monotony of narration than "Shire Tifereth," which Gordon took as a model, "Love of David and Michal" resembles the former in that it is not much more than a paraphrase of the Biblical story thrown into modern verse. And if a romantic element is sought for in this poem, it can be found, at most, in the last stanza, where the harp of David, making music, according to tradition, of its own accord, whenever the breath of the north wind touched it, became silent simultaneously with the death of Michal.

The other epic poem of Gordon, "The Wars of David with the Philistines," can lay more claim to epic qualities, in style and in rhythm as well as in treatment. It was to have been a long poem, modelled, according to the assertion of the poet, after the "Iliad," Tasso's "Jerusalem Delivered," etc., not to say a word about the "Shire Tifereth." Had he finished it, we might have had a work of real poetic significance; for Gordon did have a power of narration, and the poem possesses some of those qualities which contribute to the making of a successful epic. Unfortunately, it remained a torso.

To this romantic period, likewise, belong a few more of Gordon's longer poems: "Asnath, Daughter of Potifera," presenting some fine lyric touches; "David and Barzilai," where the simplicity of country life is contrasted with the pomp and luxury of court and city life; "In the Depth of the Ocean," a pathetic narrative based on the story of the banishment of the Jews from Spain; and a small lyrical drama of great beauty, "Alas Brother!", written on the occasion of M. J. Lebensohn's death. The last mentioned is imbued with genuine sentiment and is a noble expression of grief at the death of the young poet, the friend and inspirer of Gordon.

These poems, particularly "David and Michal,"—"The Wars of David" being a posthumous publication—immediately gained for the poet the foremost place in Hebrew poetry; but with these

his romantic period closes. Henceforth, he appears as the champion of Haskalah, his fame as such eclipsing that which he had attained as a romantic poet. In fact, neither in his make-up nor by his education, neither in his sympathies nor by his literary influences, could he have become a romanticist *par excellence*. In his make-up, Gordon had infinitely more of Voltaire and of Pope than of Shelley; he was capable of producing a "Dunciad" rather than a "Queen Mab." As for his education, he was brought up, as were most of the Lithuanian Jews of the time, upon the dry Talmudic studies, which were not even relieved by the perusal of the fantastic Kabbalistic "Zohar," the spiritual food of the Hasidim, or by a deeper understanding of the poetic and literary significance of the Bible. Finally, the literary influences on Gordon were mainly those of the Russian nihilistic school, with Pisarev and Tschernishefsky at the head, people who decried the beautiful and the imaginative and deified the utilitarian. All this combined to make of Gordon, not the poet of hope, the prophetic comforter of his people, the passionate preacher for a higher, nobler, more spiritual life, but the utilitarian, rationalistic, Haskalah poet, the passionate scoffer, the scathing satirist, the effective hater.

The second period of Gordon's poetic activity extends, roughly speaking, over the space of fifteen years, from 1865 to about 1880, and it embraces most of his narratives, some minor poems, and some fables. Of the narratives, the best known,—as a matter of fact, the most popular of all Gordon's poems—are: "The Point of a Yod" and "The Two Josephs Ben Simon." The theme of the former was not uncommon among the Hebrew writers of the time. Bath-shua, a beautiful and wealthy maiden, who has enjoyed the privileges of a secular education, is married, against her will, to a Talmudic student, who knows nothing either of the world or of the responsibilities that he is now taking upon himself. Consequently, when his father-in-law and supporter becomes impoverished, he, the husband of Bath-Shua and the father of two children, is forced to repair to sunnier climes in order to woo fortune there for himself.

The "land beyond the sea" is a lotus producing country, and people who reach its shores sometimes forget those whom they have left behind. The husband of Bath-Shua, too, coming there, gradually forgot his nearest of kin at home. Meanwhile, Bath-Shua met with a modern man, a Maskil, and, naturally, fell in love with him. The two lovers decided to find out her husband and get a divorce from him. And they succeeded. But, alas! In the divorce bill the name of Hillel, the husband, appeared without the letter Yod, whereas according to some religious authorities it is to be written with a Yod. The Rabbi, therefore, declared the divorce bill invalid, and the two lovers were thus separated forever.

The motive of this poem would at first sight seem to be really tragic. The fact that the point of a Yod could effect a separation between two lovers and keep the woman a grass widow all her lifetime, would strongly appeal to the sentiment of pity or even of horror. In reality, however, this motive is slight and by no means convincing. As the Yod is not essential, according to most religious authorities, in the name of Hillel, Fabi, the lover of Bath-Shua, could have appealed, with success, to other Rabbis, not so rigid as the one of their own town. But here another characteristic of the Haskalah writers comes to the fore. Their heroes are destitute of any energy of their own. If they lose the game, it is due to the machinations of the villain, and if they win, it is not as the result of their own activity, but is a sort of fatality, of predetermination.

Another characteristic feature of the "Point of a Yod," marking Gordon as the true representative of Haskalah, is the absence of deep sentiment, and a nobler understanding and appreciation of love, or of real beauty. "He who has not seen the daughter of Hefer, Bath-Shua, has never seen a beautiful woman,"—the poet asserts. But, when he sets about describing her, he does not even succeed in enabling us to visualize the woman, despite the five long stanzas which he wastes in the effort. When, on the other hand, the poet wishes to give a ludicrous picture of Bath-Shua's husband, he does so successfully

in two lines: "He has calf's eyes, forelocks like tails, and a face like that of the fig of Rabbi Zadok,"[1]—a conventional and by no means individualistic description, but yet, sufficient to make clear to us the appearance of the Talmudic student. Again, after the life-disappointment of Bath-Shua, she sums up her complaint in the following words, with which the poem ends: "Upon me, too, fortune once smiled; my children and I might have lived happily, leading a life of pleasure like all other women,—but the point of a Yod was my bane,"—an ending both unpoetic and characteristically utilitarian.

Broader and nobler in conception is Gordon's other long narrative poem: "The Two Josephs Ben Simon." It is the embodiment of all the hopes and aspirations of the Maskilim. The story is that of a young man whose ambition is to become an enlightened Rabbi, in order that he may soften the rigidity of the Jewish Law. For this purpose he goes to Padua, Italy, where he divides his time between the study of the Jewish Law and that of medicine, so that he may later be able to bring religion into harmony with life and science. With this ambition, Joseph Ben Simon returned to Russia, after he had completed his course of studies abroad. But, alas! his dream was not to be realized. As soon as he had stepped on Russian soil again, he was arrested and sent to Siberia—for the crime of another. During his long absence from home, a passport in his name had been issued to another person—a thing quite common in those days of official arbitrariness—who had committed a murder and escaped, leaving the passport behind at the scene of the crime. And the fact that the passport bore his name, was sufficient for the real Joseph Ben Simon to be sentenced to life imprisonment.

In this narrative, then, there is a real tragic element: the hero, rising above his surroundings and representing a social ideal, finally succumbs to the will or arbitrariness of society. Gordon, however, was the child of his age, a period in which art was sub-

[1] Rabbi Zadok foresaw, according to tradition, the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, and in order to avert the calamity, he fasted forty years in succession, sucking out the juice of a fig every evening, in this manner sustaining his life.

servient to tendency; therefore, a poem that might have been shaped into a real tragedy, ultimately resulted in a mere farce. The hero shows hardly any individuality; he represents a type or, to be more explicit, an abstract idea. Like the hero in "The Point of a Yod," moreover, he yields to fate without even an attempt at resistance.

Notwithstanding the fact that the "Two Josephs Ben Simon" excels "The Point of a Yod" in conception as well as in breadth of view, the greater popularity fell to the share of the latter. Why this preference? It is probably to be sought for in the *character* of the man of the period regardless of the tendencies of the generation. In the first place, "The Point" has the semblance of a love story. Then, again, the point of the story: the fact that a Yod, the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet, could blight the life of a beautiful young woman, strongly appealed to sentiment. Finally, the success of this poem must be attributed also to the artistic finish, as far as style and meter is concerned, which marks it in distinction from "The Two Josephs."

The materialistic-utilitarian influence of Russian literature on Gordon may be seen still more clearly in two other longer poems: "Zedekiah in the Guard House" and "In the Jaws of the Lion." The former is a very pathetic poem. It is the complaint of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, whose children were slaughtered before his eyes by Nebuchadrezzar, and himself blinded and thrown into prison. This poem is marked not only by a freely expressed atheism, but by a total misapprehension of the moral greatness of the noblest and gentlest of the prophets, Jeremiah. "What ill have I done? How have I transgressed?" moans Zedekiah. "Because I did not yield to Jeremiah? A cowardly fellow! A man of cringing disposition who gave us a shameful, slavish advice: 'Surrender!' . . . And what is the desire of this priest of Anathoth? That we carry no burden on the Sabbath! . . . He has, moreover, created a new covenant for Judah: all the people, both great and small, must study the Law . . . . All shall be scribes and prophets . . . . Each will say: 'I shall

neither plough nor thresh, for I am one of the kingdom of priests and of the holy people' . . . . And the land will be filled with priests and prophets, with visionaries and day-dreamers, chasing the east wind and gazing into the clouds,"—a strain worthy of Voltaire. And a similar spirit imbues "In the Jaws of the Lion," a narrative of the time of the Jewish war with the Romans.

Gordon also wrote a considerable number of lyric poems and rimed fables. The latter are mostly translations or adaptations from the known fabulists: Aesop, Lafontaine, Krilov, etc., while many are his own. His translations are rather skillful and have a flavor of originality about them. In general, Gordon was successful in his translations, which include some of Byron's "Hebrew melodies," some of Schiller's poems, etc. His original fables, like most of his other poems, bear the impress of the Haskalah. They are taken from the life of the bipeds rather than from that of the quadrupeds—as was natural for a person whose education practically excluded nature—and are pointed with pungent satire.

Gordon's nature and love lyrics are devoid of real sentiment and a true appreciation of the beautiful, but are rhetorical and smack of philosophy. His other lyrics and his reflective verse: "The Graveyard"—which bears a similarity to Gray's "Elegy," —"The Blessing of the Righteous," "With Our Young and Our Old We Shall Go," "My Sister Ruhamah,"—the last two of which were set to music—all these show a fund of sentiment and sincerity seldom attained by Gordon in his love and nature poems.

Among Gordon's lyrics there has been included a longer poem, "In the Moon at Night," which deserves special attention. This poem has hitherto been neglected by critics and overshadowed in popular estimation by his longer narratives. But unjustly so. For it is a masterpiece, probably the most inspired of Gordon's productions, representing him at his best, in all poetic qualities. The humor is superb, the satire deep and thoroughgoing, and its vigor and pathos are not frequently met with in his works. All this, coupled with a perfection of meter and phraseology, stamps the poem as a true work of art.

The theme of "In the Moon" is original and highly imaginative. The moon serves, according to the conception of Jewish myth, as recorder of the actions of man on our sinful globe, making use of her rays as absorbents and of her rocks and cliffs as tablets upon which to inscribe the records. Now, it happened that our poet was accidentally translated to that star. There he was astonished to find an uninhabited world, where "is no house, no field, no tree or plant, no railroad or tax on wine,—no officer to ask who I am and whether I have a passport." And in his wonderment, the poet addresses himself to the Lord: "Why didst thou create a world in vain?—Why didst thou hasten to rest on the seventh day? Hadst thou labored one or two days more, thou wouldst have formed here, too, men like unto the fishes of the sea!" Whereas on our globe, "people shed blood for every clod of earth." And while the poet is thus haranguing, he meets an angel, the secretary of heaven, who explains to him the function of the moon, exciting in this manner the curiosity of the poet, who requests the angel to let him see those interesting records. His request was, however, refused, on the plea that his life would be forever embittered at the sight. Meanwhile the dawn rises, and our poet is compelled to take hold of a ray and descend to earth.

From that time on the poet can find no rest. His desire to see the records of the moon develops into a passion. He devises different means of ascension but all in vain. He makes a balloon, which carries him only as high as the gas will allow. The Zaddik (wonder worker), to whom he applies, becomes confused at the sight of the "pidion" (the fee), and mixes up the amulet of the poet with that of a barren woman, with the result that the poet begets children while the woman ascends to heaven. He tries other devices, but they are all frustrated by various odd accidents. At last, he wins the first premium in the lottery. Having thus become suddenly enriched, he is carried to heaven "on the saddle of flattery." This time he is received with great respect by the heavenly secretary; for "even on high they respect the rich, and a thousand shekels are more valued than a

myriad of poems." And now he attains the desire of his heart, and is shown the records of the moon.

The sight is far from comforting. The whole misery of the Jewish people, social, economic, and intellectual, is here portrayed in plastic images, vivid in execution and vibrating with emotion.

It is important to observe, that, though still imbued with the Haskalah spirit, this masterpiece, written at the zenith of Gordon's poetic vigor, strikes a note not found in his earlier poems. Here, the poet is no longer solely the Haskalah representative, but is drifting towards the revival ideals that were then beginning to exert their influence upon the Jews. For, if he does not grasp at the new ideals as the saving grace of Israel, he is, at least, inclined to lend an ear to them, at the same time expressing his disappointment in the old Haskalah ideals. The poem ends with the following note of despair: "Behold, here is another record full of bubbles continually bursting like foam on the water. 'What are these?' 'These are the hopes to which thou didst raise thine eyes in the days of thy youth.' 'Alas!' I cried, and covered my face; of all my dreams not one has survived; 'a purified society,' 'the education of my rabbis,' 'the settlement of the land (Zion),' 'the rejuvenation of my people.'—And woe-stricken and desolate, I fell from heaven down to earth."

If a play upon words be permissible, one might say that the last words of this noble poem of Gordon's were symbolic of his further poetic activity. For, "In the Moon" was his last and greatest attempt to hold his own with the Hebrew muses. Soon, however, he descended therefrom, never again to rise to its heights. This poem was written during the years 1878–1882, at the end of the Haskalah and the beginning of the national revival period. After that he wrote a few vigorous poems and some fine satiric verse; these were, however, late gleanings. And though he survived that destructive period whose mouthpiece he was, he never got beyond the negative attitude to Judaism.

Gordon's poetic productions have undergone a fate similar to that of Pope's poems, with which they have much in common. The laurels that he had won during his lifetime have long ago dried up; his influence is dead, and some critics even go to the length of denying him the poetic gift altogether, arguing from the absence in his poems of certain qualities, such as love of the beautiful, which go into the make up of poetry. But, both the adoration of the poet during his lifetime and his condemnation by some later critics have been unjust. The truth of the matter is, that, as it was poor criticism on the part of his contemporaries to place him in the foremost rank of really inspired poets, so it is only conventional criticism, cut out according to hard and fast rules, that can deny him poetic endowment. That Gordon was not a poet of the first rank, is certainly true; but that he could at times rise to a great height of poetic expression, can be witnessed by his masterpiece "In the Moon;" can be testified to by some of his other poems, as well as by some passages even in his verbose and prosy longer narratives. As for the argument pointing to the lack of appreciation of real beauty and of nature, though this fact may detract so much from his poetic significance, yet, to a great extent, it may be attributed to the general shortcomings of the period. The generation of the Haskalah was simply devoid of the sense of beauty and of the feeling for nature, just as was the generation of Pope in England and that of Voltaire in France. And for similar reasons. In one phase, however, Gordon excels all other Hebrew poets, and that is, in his energetic satiric vein.

Literary Criticism

Literary criticism during the Haskalah period stood on a much lower plane than the novel and the poem. One need not wonder at this. Criticism is, in a measure, the harvest of literature, its soundness and truth depending upon the previous development of the latter; and modern Hebrew literature had not yet grown to an extent that could give scope to the operation of criticism. Criticism could, therefore, not attain at that time to any great height of truth or great depth of understanding. Yet, even at the begin-

ning of the period we hear a note of common sense, which undoubtedly did not remain without effect upon Hebrew literature.

The names of two critics stand out prominently: A. J. Paperno and A. Kovner, both of whom were active between 1864 and 1870. Neither of them was creative in this field. They promulgated no literary laws, nor did they portray any literary movement. Their fame rests upon a pamphlet or two ("Kankan Hadash Male Yashan," 1868, by A. J. Paperno; "Heker Dabar," 1865, "Zeror Perohim," 1868, by A. Kovner), where they effectively set forth the literary follies rather than the currents of the age. They show no great critical acumen nor any deep understanding of literature. Both are imbued with the Haskalah spirit, and with the literary and critical tendencies of Russian literature, from which they largely drew their inspiration. Their point of view is chiefly utilitarian; hence they judged a literary production at its face value rather than according to its intrinsic artistic merits. Yet they rendered a signal service to Hebrew literature, at least as far as externals are concerned. The spirit by which they were influenced and under which they labored, naturally excluded every superfluity, everything purely ornate in literature as well as in life. Hence, their sustained attack upon the flowery Melizah style of Hebrew, which often sacrificed sense to a nice turn of a Biblical phrase, and upon similar tawdry, conventional abuses of the language. The strictures of these two critics, to be sure, were not received with very good grace by their contemporaries. But they undoubtedly contributed more than a mite to the simplification of Hebrew style.

These were the most prominent critics of the time. For the rest, Hebrew literary criticism confined itself almost exclusively to reviews of books.

CHAPTER V

PERETZ BEN MOSHE SMOLENSKIN

(1839–1884)

The biographer of Peretz Ben Moshe Smolenskin, R. Brainin, is obviously right in saying that the Smolenskin whom we know from his novels and essays, is not the one that might have been, had he written under different circumstances. In his works we see only his silhouette, not his real portrait. While his literary personality and great talent were still in the making, his life was cut short, and Hebrew literature was bereft of one of its sincerest, most talented, and most sympathetic writers.

It would perhaps seem strange, at first sight, to speak of a writer of forty five, who already had behind him some fifteen years of literary activity, as still having been in his literary teens. The talents of Byron and Poe were fully developed before they had reached the years of Smolenskin, and they would probably not have added much to their fame, had they attained to twice their actual age. The literary, at least, the poetic, career of Lamartine was practically ended at forty, though he lived to be well advanced in years. In the case of Smolenskin, however, every page of his writings testifies to the fact that we have before us a man of great literary power, but, at the same time, that this power is artistically unripe, warped, and uncontrolled. And little wonder. Neither were his pre-literary life and training conducive to an adequate preparation for his literary career, nor did the conditions under which he carried on his activity tend fully to bring out his literary powers. Born in poverty and brought up partly under the influence of the Yeshiboth (Talmudic academies), and partly under that of Hasidism,—in an atmosphere, hostile to the spirit of modernism and secular literature, Smolenskin received neither the education nor the literary training necessary for the essayist, novelist, and spiritual

leader he later became. And even after he had attained, by sheer richness of talent, greatness of heart, and personal energy, to that ambitious eminence, his work was carried on under the stress of such abject need and forced hurry,[1] that he was not in a position to attend to artistic workmanship. For, Smolenskin was a very busy man, dividing his time between editing and managing a Hebrew monthly—"Ha-Shahar"—directing a printing firm, writing essays, novels, and criticisms, and taking a goodly share in general Jewish affairs,—all of which, however, barely yielded him a livelihood.

Smolenskin's literary activity (1869–84) extends over the end of the Haskalah period and the beginning of the revival of the Jewish national spirit, as it expressed itself in the form of the Hibbath Zion movement.

What the second phase of Haskalah was, we have had occasion to see. By the end of this period a reaction set in. Even the arch enemies of ultra-orthodox Judaism, such as Lilienblum and Gordon, saw that they had gone too far,—too far from the point of view of Jewish nationalism. For the later phase of the Haskalah movement had been essentially, though not consciously, assimilatory. "Be a Jew in your own house, but a man in society,"—had been the cry. But, as a result, the man was beginning to assert himself at the expense of the Jew, just as the life of the world without was beginning to replace the inner Jewish life, that of the Jewish home, of the synagog, of the Yeshibah. Reality overreached and deceived the devotees of the Haskalah; and therein lies the tragedy of the movement. The Maskilim of the rank and file proved a failure, as Jewish men and women. Even the enlightened Rabbis and teachers, upon whom the leaders had laid so much hope, betrayed

[1] The following may be cited as examples of Smolenskin's hurried writing: In one of his novels, "The Inheritance," he confuses the names of the heroines in the second part of the story. And literary tradition has it, moreover, that he once wrote a whole story of some sixty compact pages in print at one sitting, because he had to feed the printer's devil in one of the current numbers of "Ha-Shahar," which was to appear on the next morning,—a feat that reminds one of John Wilson, editor of "Blackwoods."

them. They formed a class for themselves, haughty and selfish, standing apart from Jewish interests, looking down upon their brethren that still sat in the "benighted" Ghetto, and occupying the function of slaves to the Russian government rather than that of teachers and leaders of their people. This condition naturally could not but wring out a cry of despair from the leaders of the Maskilim, at least from the Hebrew section.

The positive expression of this reaction was the national revival, which began as a comparatively widespread and popular movement, in the early eighties, after the notorious anti-Jewish riots in Russia. This movement, which expressed itself at first in the form of Hibbath-Zion (The Love of Zion), *i. e.*, a return to the land, the language, and the faith of the ancestors, is regarded by some as the product of Jewish repression. Nothing can be more superficial than this opinion. There are no sudden leaps and bounds in nature. Even earthquakes have their history of evolution. The Hibbath-Zion movement, quickened and ripened as it was by the national calamities in the eighties, is undoubtedly to be attributed to the reaction against the Haskalah movement. And if proof be needed for this assertion, we may go to the living fact, Smolenskin, who was the strongest link between the two movements.

In Smolenskin we see the unmistakeable evolution from the Haskalah to the revival movement. He, too, saw in Haskalah a means of uplifting his people, and he, too, made Hasidism a target at which he sped some of his winged and most pointed arrows. The "Ha-Shahar," moreover, was one of the strongholds of the Maskilim, to which the most militant of them contributed their materials. Yet, Smolenskin did not follow the old grooves which they had cut out for him. He was more penetrating and more constructive in his views and ideas. In his consuming love for his people, Smolenskin felt even at the beginning of his career, what the Maskilim were to realize later, that they were over-shooting the mark in their zeal for Haskalah.

Smolenskin developed, in a series of essays published in "Ha-Shahar," an almost systematic theory of the evolution of Jewish

history,—a theory that, to a great extent, dominates his works and draws a sharp line of distinction between him and the Maskilim. His view is idealistic, in contradistinction from theirs which was materialistic. Notice, for example, the difference between the materialistic view taken by Gordon in the poem "Zedekiah in the Guard House" and the ideologic view taken by Smolenskin in his essay "Am Olam," as regards the part played by the prophets in Jewish history, and you will see what a contrast there is between the conception of the latter and that of the Maskilim as regards Judaism.

Smolenskin's view of Jewish history is not quite scientific, but it is full of penetration and is instinct with warm feeling for his people. The history of the Jewish people is, according to Smolenskin, indissolubly connected with that of the Torah, not in its theologic sense, but in its moral significance. The Torah was given to the Jews with the purpose of uplifting them spiritually. The external frame that held them together at the beginning of their national existence was, of course, their own country; but what united them as a spiritual body and gave them their characteristic tone was the Torah. It was the spirit of the Torah and its moral greatness that imbued the Jews with national endurance and elasticity even after they had lost their national independence. And Smolenskin lays stress upon the point that the Jews have remained a nation to this day and are not merely a religious sect, as the German-Jewish philosopher, Moses Mendelsohn, asserted. Against this latter theory and its corollary, the so-called Berlin Haskalah, Smolenskin severely inveighed, pointing out its denationalizing tendency and the national havoc which it had wrought among the immediate disciples of Mendelsohn, as well as among later generations. This judgement passed upon Mendelsohn's theory—and, by the way, also upon the man himself,—in one of Smolenskin's most penetrating essays, "Eth Laasoth," naturally met with resentment on the part of the Maskilim, who considered themselves the heritors of the Berlin Haskalah; but it was ultimately adopted in Hebrew literature as a truism.

From this view of Jewish history held by Smolenskin arises his opposition to the extreme reform movement, in the shape which it assumed among the German Jews, and his difference of opinion with the Maskilim as regards the educational endeavors among the Jews. Since the Torah is not merely a religious code but a product of, as well as a stimulus to, the national spirit, and since it continued to develop along national lines all through Jewish history, it follows that it cannot entirely be stripped of its later forms, and be based simply upon a couple of dogmas; for then you strip it of its whole significance, which is really national, and make it a mere theologic abstraction. It is true that Jewish religion needs a pruning, on account of some undesirable shoots which have overgrown it during long ages; but this should by no means be done artificially. Educate the people and the reforms will come by themselves. There is no use in demanding of a blind person that he appreciate the beauties of nature; open his eyes and nature will reveal itself to him in all its grandeur.

Another factor in Jewish nationalism, perhaps more important than religion, was, for Smolenskin, the Hebrew language and literature. If religion is one means of preserving national existence, Hebrew is the only repository for the national attributes and creations. Hence, Hebrew should be cherished as a prime national factor *per se*. And in this respect, again, he differs from the Maskilim, for whom Hebrew was a preferable, but not an essential, channel of Haskalah.

In these two things, then, in the reversion to Jewish religion and in regarding Hebrew as essential to nationalism, Smolenskin was the forerunner of the national revival movement. The third and most important requisite of the revival, the rehabilitation of Palestine, was at first disregarded by Smolenskin, evolving with him only in the course of years.

I have gone to the length of discussing Smolenskin's theory of Jewish history, not only because it is interesting in itself, or in order to point out the difference between him and the Maskilim, but because it is necessary to the understanding of his novels and of the development of Hebrew literature as a whole. Smol-

enskin came to the latter with a new message,—one that was more positive and constructive than that of the Maskilim. For him, Hebrew as such was of paramount importance. And though encouraging Haskalah and himself marked by many a trait of the Maskil, he freed Hebrew literature, by theory and practice, from the Haskalah tendency, from the tyranny of bias, making it an aim in itself and not merely a means of conveying certain opinions. In this manner, Hebrew literature was given more scope for the purely artistic and literary, and for the freer development of individual character.

Though Smolenskin contributed to the advancement of Hebrew literature by freeing it, in a measure, from the onesidedness of tendency, he could not entirely liberate his own novels from the shackles of the age. As regards appreciation of nature, for example, his novels are as deficient as the other stories of the time. Not a bit of blue sky, fleecy cloud, or green turf do we find in them; they carry us along on their swift currents of events, without giving us time to admire a beautiful scene that we may meet on our way. Nor is the art in his novels flawless. Smolenskin was, it is true, a man of temperament; but his temperament was that of the preacher rather than that of the artist. The plot is not so loose, flimsy, and irrational as, let us say, that of Mapu's "Ayit Zabua;" but there is much even in Smolenskin's novels that is questionable and out of joint. In general, to use a figure of Brunetiere, his novels float about in their frames, for Smolenskin makes great use of character and event for the purpose of sermonizing, moralizing, and perorating on anything and everything under the sun. And as it happens with many an author whose vanity gets the better of his artistic taste, Smolenskin prided himself upon his commonplace philosophizing more than upon the really enduring phases of his novels. Thus, in a letter to a friend, he expresses his great satisfaction at the rather banal discussion of the relation of Hamlet to Faust, which, in his eyes, surpasses in importance the whole novel "The Joy of the Wicked," in which he succeeded in casting up some interesting psychologic problems.

If Smolenskin is diffusive in the plot of his novel, he is, however, capable of dealing with a single situation in a masterly manner. Witness, for example, the scene between the Austrian Jewish detective and the typically Viennese girl ("The Inheritance," pt. 3, ch. 2). See also the conversation between the "batlanim" (typical Talmudic students) in the synagog, in the introductory chapter of "The Ass's Burial," and also part of the scene between the emigrants to America ("Pride and Overthrow"),—in all these you will find an abundance of humor and, at the same time, a knowledge of men in the various pursuits of life.

The knowledge of men,—this is another characteristic that distinguishes Smolenskin from the Maskilim. The views and the sympathies of the latter were narrow, bookish; the atmosphere was attenuated, and the sphere of activity limited to one class, the middle class, which was, in its turn, artificially divided into "enlightened" and "unenlightened." In Smolenskin's novels, the range of view is wide, comprehensive. It embraces not only various classes but also various nations. See, for example, "Ha-Toeh BeDarkey Ha-Hayyim," his best known novel, which like "David Copperfield," though with less coherence of events, is the "truth and fiction" about the life of the author. What a kaleidoscopic view we get here of personages, classes, and peoples! Not only Russian Jewry passes in review before us, in a great many phases and in a variety of classes, but also the Jewries of some other countries, the author reflecting, at the same time, in marginal acute remarks upon other nationalities. It must, however, be owned that Smolenskin was not always just in dealing with other nationalities, his attitude towards them being at times prejudiced by the love he bore his own nation. His view of the Polish revolution may serve as an example of his bias. With a great deal of truth about the inefficiency of the Polish revolutionaries, the bragging and vanity of their leaders and their petty quarrels for office, and, particularly, their thanklessness towards their Jewish allies, he yet treated them with a severity and lack of sympathy tantamount to cruelty.

Smolenskin's novels mark a departure in Hebrew literature in many other important directions. In the first place, he introduced real tragedy into the Hebrew. His predecessors, such as Mapu, kept tragedy in the background. They worked, so to say, deductively. When they introduce us to the scene of action, the great crime—the pivot of the story—has already been committed. The virtuous person, *i. e.*, the Maskil, has been put out of the way, and his family, also composed of the enlightened, is now suffering at the hands of villainy; but we can predict from the very beginning the ultimate triumph of virtue. It is true that Smolenskin's contemporaries, Gordon, for example, who aimed at demonstrating the ill results of bigotry and superstition, have given us tragedies; they were, however, not real, dramatic, but pseudo, tragedies. There was no play of will against will, but of idea against idea. The characters were abstractions, without individuality. Will, character, did not count for much, for the disaster came about by the hard heartedness of a Rabbi or a predeterminate religious law. Smolenskin, on the contrary, presented tragedy in its really tragic and dramatic elements. Not that he was more pessimistic than the Maskilim. He who entitled one of his novels "The Reward of the Virtuous," ending it with the exulting words: "Truly, this is the reward of the Righteous!"—can indeed not be accused of pessimism. But, his range of view being more comprehensive than that of the Maskilim, he found in life more tragedy than they. Besides, being a person of great strength of will and character, and of indomitable energy, it was natural for him to endow his heroes with the same qualities. Hence, the really dramatic element in his novels.

The psychologic element, then, plays a great part in Smolenskin's novels; indeed, if it does not always form the axis upon which they revolve, it at least constitutes a component part of them. Even in "Ha-Toeh BeDarkey Ha-Hayyim," primarily a novel of manners, the character of the main hero evolves into tragic individuality; consumed as he is by sexual love for his own sister, whom he, at first, did not know to be any relative of his, and

finally killed when hurling himself in passionate despair against a rioting mob in Russia. Similarly, the heroes of his other novels. Note the boldly delineated psychic features of the passionate heroine of "The Inheritance," Peninah, with all the consciousness of the shame of her sinful parents, and her impetuous humbling of herself before her friends, on account of it. Contrast, at the same time, her character with that of the calm, brilliant Viennese girl, in the same novel; healthy, charming, lively, full of wit, with a loving heart and a pleasant admixture of innocence and common sense. Witness, again, the noble, but fitful and whimsical hero of the same story, Zerahiah, who brings upon himself, because of his eccentricities, a host of misfortunes and a series of real or imaginary humiliations. Finally, Smolenskin, in at least two of his novels, makes individuality the very pivot of the story. In "The Ass's Burial," the ultimate ruin and death of the hero are the results of his boastful and vainglorious character; and the motive of "The Joy of the Wicked" hinges upon the fickleness of the hero, who abandons his beautiful wife and child to follow a commonplace girl.

When we speak of the psychologic element of Smolenskin's novels, however, it is to be understood in the relative sense of the word, as compared with other Hebrew novels of the time. Considered by themselves, they leave many a psychologic gap. The characters are at times blurred and indistinct. The distinctive traits of the hero in the "The Ass's Burial," for example, are not clearly enough delineated to justify the motive of the story. Again, when Smolenskin happens upon a problematic character, he is sometimes at a loss as to the manner of handling it. Take, for example, the heroine of the story related by the "friend of Zarhi," in "Pride and Overthrow." The author introduces us to a girl of the type of George Eliot's Gwendolen, very beautiful and very whimsical, whose word is law unto her parents and who sets the hearts of all young men aflame. He leaves this enigmatic character, however, so well adapted for deeper psychologic study, entirely undeveloped, and, moreover, gives the story the ridiculous ending of making the heroine elope

with a Polish nobleman, who afterwards drives her to commit moral suicide,—an ending that has become almost a hobby with Smolenskin, at least, in some episodes of his novels. And speaking of this heroine, one cannot help thinking of another interesting feature in the novels of Smolenskin, namely, the stress that he lays upon Jewish education as a factor in the development of character, pointing out, in this story and in many others, the moral ills engendered by the lack of such education,—a theory quite in keeping with his national views.

Finally, a word as to the style of Smolenskin. This author is a purist, but not in the same sense as Mapu had been. He never hesitated to make use of a Biblical phrase, whenever it suited his purpose; but he did not abuse this practice, always avoiding the pun and quibble of the Melizah. His style is energetic, exuberant, and full of life; but there is a total absence in it of the imaginative and the figurative, which are essential qualities in the style of fiction.

In short, Smolenskin's novels mark an advance in Hebrew literature. He freed the latter from the tyranny of bias, of tendency and, at the same time, began the emancipation of the individual in fiction, bringing in the personal element and thereby giving character and individuality free scope to develop. By his energy, earnestness, and personal charm, moreover, he gave the Hebrew an impetus which raised it to a height more considerable than that to which it had ever before risen during the last century. His influence was great both upon his contemporaries and upon later writers. In his lifetime he drew about himself a circle of literary friends and he helped to develop many a young talent; and after he was gone, his impress still remained upon Hebrew thought and Hebrew letters.

CHAPTER VI

THE REVIVAL MOVEMENT

The revival period in Hebrew literature, as well as in Jewish life, was one of reaction to that of the Haskalah movement. We have seen that the latter was, in the main, negative, and not apt to endear Jewishness to its votaries. It did not directly touch the masses of the people, but upon the Maskilim it had, in a measure, a disintegrating effect. A movement such as this could not for long remain at full tide. The people as a whole was Jewish, nationalistically Jewish; and their economic and political sufferings, moreover, were not alleviated by the endeavors of the Haskalah. What the Maskilim did accomplish was the freedom and tolerance of religious opinion within Jewry itself; but what about their belief in Haskalah as the medium through which to solve Jewish problems in relation to the outside world? This was a dream that flitted away as soon as they rubbed their eyes and awoke to the truth. And the truth, the reality was disappointing in the extreme. Hence the note of despair in the writings of the period at its twilight.

The natural decadence of the Haskalah, then, and the potent influence of Smolenskin were the negative and positive forces respectively, that prepared the way for the revival movement. That, however, which gave the strongest impetus to the latter, were the riots against the Jews in Russia during 1881–82. This cruel occurrence effected at one blow what it would have taken decades of quiet propaganda to accomplish. It brought back to the fold those who had strayed away; it tore the people away from disintegrating external influences, and it created a Jewish national policy. It aroused the slumbering consciousness of the Jews, and taught them to seek their salvation not in assimilation with other peoples, not in a currying of favor with them by means of a slavish imitation of their manners and customs,

but in segregation, in an internal strengthening and developing of their own resources.

This new movement, which assumed the concrete form of "Hibbath Zion," a forerunner of political Zionism, was a reversion to a distinctively Jewish life, to the language of the ancestors as a living tongue, and to the land of the ancestors as a source of vital strength. Its influence upon Jewish reality was immense. Between the years 1882 and 1891, when Hibbath Zion reached its high water mark, some forty or fifty thousand Jews left eastern Europe and settled in Palestine. There they built up a number of colonies, and founded a community which was later to create a national and cultural atmosphere of no mean significance. Schools and societies sprang up in all parts of the diaspora, for the purpose of reviving the Hebrew language. As for the literature, it was no longer to be regarded simply as a medium for propaganda, but as an aim in itself, as a literature that should express the national genius and embody Jewish cultural life.

The evolution of Hibbath Zion into a fully conscious national movement was, however, a gradual process. In its inception, it was a vague reality. To the masses, in so far as it had enlisted their sympathy and coöperation, it meant but a means of escape from immediate suffering. The journalist regarded it merely as a solution to the material Jewish problems; whereas to the poet it was an undefined romantic yearning for the old glory of mother Zion. That it was, at first, no more than this sort of yearning, can best be seen from the attitude of the poets that ushered in this revival period in Hebrew literature: M. Z. Mané, M. M. Dolitzky, and C. Shapiro.

Mané began his literary activity in 1879, at the age of twenty, but was not destined to develop a talent that was of no mean degree: for he wasted away of consumption in 1885. His poetic career thus falls at the extreme end of the Haskalah and at the beginning of the revival period. From the former he inherited the puristic style, the hendecasyllabic line, and the sestet stanza. Otherwise, there is a wide gap between him and the poets of

that age. And the distinction is not merely due to the difference in period, but it is also, and perhaps mainly, temperamental. For Mané was an artist by profession, a painter of promise,—a fact that is of great importance in his case. This accounts for his great devotion to art and nature for their own sake, and this also explains the fact that though he belonged to the new period, he was not its mouthpiece in so conscious a manner as, for instance, Dolitzky.

Mané came to Hebrew literature with a new precept: art for art's sake, or beauty for its own sake. As a theory, he formulated it in one of his essays, "The Aim of the Arts and Their Function." "The aim of the arts, of poetry, music, and the plastic arts," he says, "is beauty . . . . For beauty is an aim in itself." Had an utterance such as this ever before fallen from the lips of a Hebrew! And this theory Mané, consciously or unconsciously, applied in practice to his poems. He lived in an artistic world of his own, and his absorption in art and in nature was so thorough that he entirely forgot the living world around him. Not a word of protest against the atrocities committed upon the Jews in Russia, in 1881–2, is heard in his poems; nor do we find in them a trace of such a necessary component of lyric poetry as love.

There are some points of resemblance between Mané and one of his predecessors, Micah J. Lebensohn. Both shared the same fate, dying young and of the same disease, and both were enamored of the beautiful. But with this the resemblance is exhausted; for the rest, there is the difference of individuality between them. Lebensohn's central passion is love, which he worshipped even at the expense of art; Mané's master passion is art, even to the exclusion of love. Lebensohn is the stronger, the more passionate nature: Mané is the gentler nature and the greater artist.

Perhaps the greatest number of Mané's poems, certainly the most interesting, deal with nature. One finds in them, it is true, no great variety of scenery. The arcana of nature are not revealed to the poet; nor are the might of the storm-tossed

ocean and the depth of the forest primeval known to him. It is the simple scenery of European Russia, such as Mané knew it, of which he sings. He loves above all those phenomena of nature which accord, in their calmness, and, perhaps, also in their picturesqueness, with his own artistic and gentle temperament: the sunrise and sunset, for example, which either form the theme of a great many of his poems or, at least, tinge them with their colors. Mané, however, makes up for this lack of scenic variety by the diversity of presentation of these simple moods of nature. And he presents them as the impressionist would paint them: here and there a vigorous touch, a dab of light, an expression by masses of color,—a process that in poetry, however, leaves the picture at times somewhat vague and unfinished.

Mané, unlike Lebensohn, was too much preoccupied with his wasting disease to be able to abandon himself to the enjoyment of life and to give vent to any sort of hilarious mood. A dreamy, melancholy tone vibrates through all his poems and a desolate loneliness pervades even the verses he indited to his friends. It is only in the bosom of nature that he finds consolation: "Were it not for the birds singing so brightly, offering their songs in cheery delight, and the odorous flowers refreshing my soul, appearing before me in multitude of colors; were it not for the sparkling stars, the eyes of heaven, that brighten the dark night for me,—my soul would no longer yearn for life, nor the sparks of hope rise within me." It is, moreover, through the medium of nature, through its simple phenomena that Mané has attained to a deeply religious sentiment, and it is by means of communion with this same agency that he thinks and sings of mother Zion.

In brief, Mané was the first to reintroduce the personal element into Hebrew poetry; and he did it with a vengeance, substituting for the collective, class sentiment of the Maskilim the self-centered individualistic emotion and making up for their neglect of nature by an idolatrous adoration for it and absorption in it. As for his participation in the temper and the aspirations of the age, "The Love of Zion" was for him—vague

yearning woven into the woof of his dreams rather than a palpable reality that could take possession of his whole being.

Some time before his death, Judah L. Gordon addressed a poem to M. M. Dolitzky, saying: "Here is my pen, go and take my place!" This happened in 1891, when the younger poet was compelled to leave Russia for America. Gordon was then past his poetic activity, and Dolitzky, too, had already delivered himself of the best there was in him. This greeting, therefore, on the part of the former was, it is evident, a mere complimentary rhetorical flourish; for poor as Gordon was as a critic, he could not have found in Dolitzky's verse much more than smoothness and swing to justify the crowning of the latter as poet laureate after himself. For Dolitzky never attained the breadth of view or even the pathos of the elder poet. He brought nothing new to Hebrew literature; nor has he otherwise shown any originality in his verse. He made his debut with a narrative poem, of little value, which represented the life of the Hasidim and was written in the style and tone of the Haskalah poetry. Later he was carried off into the vortex of the revival, the poetic expression of which he became.

The fame of Dolitzky rests chiefly upon his Zionides, some of which were set to music and became popular songs. If these poems, however, were critically examined, they could hardly stand the test; for they would be found cold, declamatory, pregnant with sentimentality rather than with sentiment. But the ease and smoothness of versification and, particularly, the romantic halo with which the poems surrounded "Mother Zion," or, to be more explicit, the halo with which Mother Zion encompassed the poems, made them appear unrivalled in the eyes of the Hebrew reader, then in the first flush of the revival. Yet, it would be unjust to Dolitzky to deny him sentiment altogether. Poems such as "On the Ruins of Zion" and "My Request" show both nobility and reality of sentiment.

Dolitzky's muse became atrophied in America, a land that has so far been unfavorable to the development of the Hebrew

language and literature. He produced in this country, too, a number of poems, a ballad of the time of the crusades, and a longer, rather tedious, narrative poem, which he seems to have written or, at least, begun in Europe, but only a fragment of which was published there. Of all these poems, however, only the one entitled "Whose Dawn Art Thou?", on the flitting hopes and aspirations of youth,—though not displaying any originality, and being, in the main, a repetition of a previous production, "Visions and Errors,"—yet presents some inspired lines.

Dolitzky also wrote, in the form of a novel, the story of his expulsion from Russia; and in America he took to writing Yiddish stories of the dime novel kind.

Constantine A. Shapiro (1840–1900), is, both as a man and as a writer, perhaps the most interesting as well as the most tragic figure in modern Hebrew literature. In his youth, he tasted of the forbidden fruit of the Haskalah, for which he was persecuted and driven from home. He then went to St. Petersburg, where he hoped to satisfy the cravings of his artistic temperament. In that city he committed the crime against himself and his people which was to fill him for the rest of his life with remorse and bitterness. He, there, joined the Greek Orthodox Church. And this step was made not out of conviction, but at the blind impulse of a momentary feeling. During the first days of his stay in St. Petersburg, he had become sick from misery and starvation and had been taken care of by a Russian girl, poor, simple, and kind. Half out of gratitude and half out of love, he led her to the altar, receiving her hand together with her religion.

From that time on, Shapiro steadily rose in worldly affairs. Displaying great talent in photography, he became the court artist of a Russian prince and the official photographer of the academy of arts, his fame spreading all over the Russian capital, and beyond it. But he paid for all this with the peace of his soul; for, from the moment of his conversion he knew no rest. The new society, into which he had entered, was not congenial to him.

"In vain have I plunged into the *waters of Jordan*,
In vain have I sought to brighten my gloom;
No rest shall I find till I lie in my tomb,"—

he complains in one of his pathetic poems. The world from which he had departed, on the other hand, spurned him as a renegade. His passionate soul, therefore, which yearned for sympathy and recognition and which was so sensitive to blame, to the terrible word " meshummad " (renegade), was rent in twain. A number of poems, intense in their passion, bear witness to the self torture, to the mental agony, of the poet; and in some of them his overpowering feeling rises to a white heat and he vents his rage not only against himself, but against the world as a whole:

"O that my arms could the world infold
And my lips could emit some swift flaming breath;
'round all creation I'd tighten my hold,
And clasp it to stifling, kiss it to death."

And he was so haunted by the offence of his conversion, that he came to regard it not as a voluntary act on his part, but as the result of a sort of fatality.

In contrast with this strength of passion, which attests Shapiro's own state of mind and feeling, stands the gentleness with which he approaches Jewish national subjects. He expresses a tenderness, an infinite yearning for the life of the Ghetto and its ideals. In the poems dealing with these subjects, Shapiro's imagination is aglow with memories and portraits, and his verse is instinct with emotion and with love for the Jewish people and its sacred possessions. Even the old time Hebrew teacher, otherwise not a great favorite with the modern Jew, touches a tender cord in his heart, whereas the teacher's sweet, innocent little daughter altogether brightens up the gloom of the Heder (Hebrew school). Jewish legends, Biblical figures and stories, tune his lyre to the songs of the rejuvenation of the Jewish people, and to the "Prinzessin" Sabbath he devotes a couple of poems Heinesque in their representation of its holiness and sublimity.

These national poems must have been a balsam to Shapiro's wounded heart. The intensity of his passion is relaxed; a gentle sadness pervades them all, and they emit a warmth that penetrates the heart like new wine. Yet, even in these he sometimes gives vent to his sullen remorse. Here and there a groan is wrung from his breast or a note of despair chimes in, which tells the tale of his anguish and his tortured feelings. And in a posthumous poem he pictures this mental state in an excrutiating manner, representing himself as being spurned by his people in the midst of a joyous scene in the rejuvenated Zion.

The artistic significance of Shapiro's poems is not very great. There is in them a constant conscious struggle for expression,—a struggle due to an insufficient knowledge of the Hebrew; and the rhythm suffers accordingly. Yet Shapiro contributed to Hebrew poetry some of the finest verse and some of the most original figures, of which the following stanza may serve as an illustration:

> "In vain are you shedding the brine of your eyes;
> The torment within will nor cease nor depart.
> Hell you'll not quench with the dew of the skies,
> Nor with tears will you still the live flame of the heart."

These poets, then, while ushering in the new period in Hebrew literature and in the life of eastern Jewry, did not yet give utterance to a fully conscious national sentiment, such as was to develop in the nineties. The exponent and theoretician of Jewish nationalism was still to come, and the Love of Zion was, at least to the poets of the time, simply a more modernized spiritual Zion of the prayer book.

CHAPTER VII

SHALOM JACOB ABRAMOVITZ AND SHALOM RABINOVITZ

Before approaching the more modern phases of Hebrew literature, as influenced and dominated by the conscious nationalistic movement, two writers are to be considered, who, at first glance, seem to occupy a place for themselves, apart from the course of evolution of Hebrew literature, but who, looked at more closely, prove to be links, and important ones, in the chain of development. These are: Shalom Jacob Abramovitz and Shalom Rabinovitz.

When we left Abramovitz in the sixties of the bygone century, he had already done some useful work, but he had hardly manifested any signs of the great gifts that he later unfolded. When he reappeared in Hebrew literature, somewhere about 1887, his fame as a story writer had already been established. He had not only made a mark in literature, but he had struck out on a new path all by himself. When he had left Hebrew, he had done so with the express purpose of going down to bring light into the humble dwellings of those Jews for whom Yiddish, not Hebrew, was the medium of literary expression. He, accordingly produced some of his best works in Yiddish, a language which he greatly enriched with his peculiar genius and for which he created the literary style. He returned to Hebrew only after its expansion under the national influence, when it had reformed its diction, modernized its vocabulary, and widened its scope, encroaching even upon the territory of the Yiddish among the masses. We are, however, justified in speaking of Abramovitz as a *Hebrew* writer, not only because he did some original work in this language, but also because he translated his Yiddish productions into Hebrew,—a translation tantamount to original creation as regards style, the reshaping of the material, and the addition of new features.

Abramovitz is, in some measure, still under the spell of the Haskalah movement. The Maskil, the man of the book, is idealized in his works, and at times set up as a kind of Christ suffering for humanity. His characters, though much more distinct than those of the Haskalah novel, generally stand out not as individuals but as types. Like the Maskilim, again, though from a different point of view, he seeks the cause of Jewish misery not so much in external circumstances as in the internal condition of the Jews. Yet, he is far in advance of the Maskilim, not only in point of talent but also as regards tendency and temperament. The very fact that he selects his heroes from "the lower strata of society" and that he substitutes the economic for the religious conditions as the primary cause of Jewish sufferings, forms a wide gap between him and the Haskalah writers. Yet Abramovitz lived and worked mainly in the pre-revival period, to which, in a large measure, he owes his inspiration; he, therefore, could not break through this charmed circle even during the later period. "I was drawn thither" (to the bygone age), he says, in his humorous way, in the preface to "The Priziv," "to that corner of Jewish life, where my old familiar heroes live,—those heroes of whom I used to tell my audience strange and fantastic, weird and wonderful stories. I met them, thanked be the Lord, all hale and sound, with their old caprices and quaint ways. They are fruitful and they multiply, play the fool at times, and, as formerly, pull each other by the nose on account of a trifle. . . . We immediately recognized one another and were glad to see each other well and alive. I regarded them with delight and fed my eyes on their forms, reviewing them from head to foot. And now I am giving a description of some of them in this book." This was written in 1884, when new types with different tendencies and aspirations had already appeared on the stage of Jewish history. Even when Abramovitz deals with a subject of our own age, as in his shorter sketches written since 1887, his heroes are, in the main, taken from those types that belong to his favorite age rather than to ours.

A writer with a propensity such as this, with a fondness for a particular age, is in danger of centering attention upon the period at the expense of character, is liable to generalize the latter rather than to individualize it, to present types illustrating the period rather than individuals illustrating themselves. And that is precisely what happens to the heroes of Abramovitz. "Here you have, gentlemen," he says in one of his stories, "the picture of Benjamin the sage and counsellor, whose like is rarely to be met with in Israel in our own day,"—and this characterization is very telling as regards the method of Abramovitz in his stories. Not that he was incapable of admirably delineating individual character. The masterly drawing of Fishke the Lame, in the "Book of Schnorrers"—a masterpiece of its kind—conclusively proves with what power Abramovitz could wield the pen in giving individuality to character. It was only the absorption in the period which made him neglect personalities. And this absorption seems to have been a conscious one; it seems to have been the ambition of the author to represent and perpetuate in story a whole period complete in detail and vivid and rounded in description. And here is really where the strength of Abramovitz lies; for he succeeded in fully entering into the spirit of the time, reproducing it by means of typified character and representation of manner.

Abramovitz is best known by his nom-de-plume, Mendele Mocher Sefarim (Mendele the Book Seller), and a more fortunate name he could not have taken to himself. For "Book Seller" is not to be understood in the English but in the Ghetto sense of the word. It is a travelling book dealer, a person curious and inquisitive, a good listener to stories and a good narrator; and though somewhat more learned than his fellow Jew, he is yet a man of the people, without the slightest haughtiness or pride. And the literary physiognomy of Abramovitz, with his curiosity and inquisitiveness, his remarkable acquaintance with the life and manners of the people, the public psychology of the age, his marvelous power of story telling, and his racy colloquial style, completely answer to this description of Mocher Sefarim. To

this, however, may be added another important trait of Abramovitz, which, again, often goes to the completion of the cast of features of a happy-go-lucky book vender,—a blithe and homely humor.

The humor of Abramovitz is peculiarly his own and, at the same time, distinctively Jewish; yet the influence of the great Russian humorist, Saltykov, is clearly felt therein. This can be seen in different manifestations, in the democracy and sympathy with the common people, in the tearful laughter, and in the fact that, like the Russian humorist, Abramovitz generally places his heroes in the town Glupsk—in Russian it is Glupov—namely, Fool's Town. It must be remarked, however, that the Jewish humorist adds another place, a characteristically Jewish place, as the scene of action for his stories: Kabzansk, namely, Poor-Town. Here the whole misery of his people is both symbolized and described. Here, the universal legend of the Jewish riches becomes a mockery; young and old are in a constant state of starvation, and the hunt for bread degenerates, because of poverty, into a seeking for prey. Here, moreover, humility, enforced by suffering and persecution, sinks to degradation and pusilanimity. Then, again, the drowning of the voice of nature, the demands of nature, in the voice of God, the commands of God, and the soothing of passion with the words of the Law,—all of which prove that under the outer crust of misery and degradation the heart is vitally sound and even capable of exaltation to poetic nobility.

This misery and degradation and this poetry of the Ghetto, of the real, Russian Ghetto, Abramovitz pictures with so much Anglican vividness of detail, with such pathetic humor and sympathetic affection, that the period stands out to us, as it undoubtedly will stand out to future generations, as clear and distinct as society in Cranford in Gaskell's novel of that name. These are the qualities to be sought in the stories of Abramovitz, and these, plus a penetrating humoristic-satiric vein and a naturally colloquial style, are what assign him a foremost place in Hebrew literature.

The works of Abramovitz may be roughly divided into two parts: stories taken directly from life and allegorical or symbolical narratives. In the stories of the first class, he is at his best in the "Book of Schnorrers." It is the simple story of a beggar, Fishke the Lame, who was married to a blind beggar woman that became faithless to him, preferring the company of another, stronger than he and the leader of the whole straggling band of beggars. Fishke, disgusted with his wife, falls in love with a hunch-backed, black eyed maiden, as soulful as himself, who lives in the same company. But here, too, the "Red One," the lustful leader, is in the way, teasing and torturing them, and, finally, ejecting Fishke altogether from the band.

The "Book of Schnorrers" is the masterpiece of Abramovitz. The artistic temperament, pure and simple, is here exhibited. There is no conscious or unconscious tendency to preach, as there is in most of his other works, and, in general, it is the most objective of his writings. We, therefore, find the author at his best in this story. The character of Fishke stands out boldly and in all its simplicity, indelibly impressing itself upon the recollection of the reader. A most delightful humor is blended with a pathos that is just sufficient to rouse sympathy for the hero. And there is a wonderful power of narration, which grips one's interest and holds it from beginning to end. Finally, there is in this story a wealth of scenic description and an appreciation of nature, which alone would suffice to set Abramovitz above the Haskalah novelist, if nothing else would, and of which one may be justified in citing the following examples:

"The sky is all blue, marred here and there by a slight cloud. The sun burns hot; not a breeze blows, not a stir of breath. Neither the corn nor the trees are moving; they stand silent and patient. A few cows lie in the field with necks outstretched, shaking their ears, while some impatiently paw on the ground or strike it with their horns. One ox, with raised tail, is racing to and fro; he suddenly stops, bends down his forehead, breathing heavily and snorting, lowing and kicking up his hoofs, while the steam rises from his nostrils. Beside an old willow, crooked and

cloven by lightning, a few horses are standing together, shadowing each other with their necks, and wagging their tails to brush off the flies and mosquitoes. On the top of the tree, a crow, wrapped up in a small praying shawl of mixed white and blue is swinging himself on a twig. Bowing his head in prayer and prostrating himself, faintly hopping, stretching out his neck, straightening his head, and, then, dozing off with open eyes. Silence reigns over the whole road; not a leaf is stirring, not a flap of a bird's wing is heard. Only the flies and mosquitoes, nimble folk, are keeping holiday in the atmosphere, flitting here and there, buzzing some secret into the ear and then disappearing."

Or the return from a fair:

"Farmers' wagons and carts are coming and going, some with nothing but a bit of straw spread on the bottom, and some laden with utensils and all sorts of saleable articles. On one wagon lies a pig wholly hidden in a sack, poking out only the tip of his nostril into the air and uttering grunts that reverberate in the distance and jar upon the ear. To the back of next wagon, laden with earthenware, is fastened a dapple cow with only one horn, straining with all her strength to break away and run home to see how her sisters fare in the stall. Two patient oxen broad-hipped and big-bellied, accustomed to work and quietly bear the yoke, are chewing the cud with earnestness and great intentness. At the same time, the goat of the innkeeper, jumps, with wicked design, on to the crowded wagon, steals up to a bag full of something, puts her head into it, and, getting a mouthful of eatables, immediately withdraws it, sneezing and jerking her tail, chewing rapidly, moving her jaws and beard at the rate of sixty moves a minute. Meanwhile, her eyes wander on all sides, lest some danger be at hand. A village cur, thin and emaciated, lame in one leg and with a bushy tangle at the end of his tail, who has been dismissed from service and is now supporting himself at the dunghill of the community, comes limping, raising his eyes to the wagon and looking at it respectfully from a distance. Then he grows more daring, comes nearer, and sniffs out from somewhere a dry bone, which no longer has even the tiniest

amount of humidity, limps away hastily with his treasure in his mouth, stretches out on the ground and chews at the bone, holding his head sideways on his paws. A horse fastened to the fence, standing idle and drowsy, with open eyes and drooping underlip, suddenly takes it into his head to move across towards a pair of oxen, who stand opposite him, eating hay out of one sack, in order to share their supper. But, on his way he is careless enough to entangle his pole in the wheel of the other wagon, almost overturning it. Whereupon, the horse of the other wagon gets frightened and, jumping out of its harness, kicks the neighboring horse, who, on his part, feels insulted and rears neighing aloud. The goat, then, grows excited and leaps down upon the cur squeezing his tail; thereupon the cur jumps up and runs away limping and howling."

Next in importance of this class of stories are: "Homunculus" and "In the Valley of Weeping." The art of the former rests mainly upon the skilful linking together of the chain and sequence of events, through which the hero passes before coming to the position of "little man" in the community,—whereas "In the Valley of Weeping" distinguishes itself with its broad latitude and with its kaleidoscopic view of the manners of the period. Neither of these stories, however, attained the artistic perfection of the "Book of Schnorrers." There is hardly any character drawing in either: the hero of "Homunculus" is a type rather than an individual, whereas in "In the Valley," with the exception of a few minor personages that are individualized, in the manner of Dickens, by ludicrous external traits rather than by psychologic attributes, the characters are generally pale and anaemic. Moreover, if in the other stories of Abramovitz there is very little plot commensurate with their length, in "In the Valley," the attempt at such is brought to a speedy and abrupt ending. Yet, both stories mentioned abound in striking situations and in unexcelled descriptions of Ghetto life and manners. Moreover, there is in them, at least, one interesting cord that strikes a novel note in Hebrew literature, namely, insight into the life and spirit of children. Attempts at representing the

latter in story had been made even before Abramovitz. But what were those children? Merely men and women in short clothes. Abramovitz was the first to give a picture of the child consistent with its nature. And he did it with gusto, with a sort of thrilling pleasure. He loves not only to delineate its character but also to trace its growth and development into manhood. Three stories bear witness to this fondness for children: "Homunculus," "In the Valley," and "In Those Days,"—in all of which the children described are real, children of flesh and blood. Hershele in "The Valley of Weeping," probably in imitation of a quack, plays the physician, operates upon the foot of his little friend with a rusty nail, and then cures it with a concoction of his own make, not forgetting salt as an important ingredient of the medicine. Shlomele, in "In Those Days," lives through in imagination all the stories and legends found in the Bible or told him by his teacher. And Isaac Abrahamze's fancy is so possessed with the "manikin" (the reflection in the pupil of the eye), that he strikes his mother a hard blow in the head, in order that he may see the manikin jump out of her eyes.

Of the purely imaginative works of Abramovitz, two may be singled out: "The Mare" and "The Travels of Benjamin III." The former is an allegory of the Jewish people, its life and condition among the nations. The mare is the Jew (in accordance with a verse in Canticles: "Unto the mare in Pharaoh's chariot do I compare thee, my beloved"), windbroken, foot-sore, pestered by flies and gnats, molested and driven from place to place by the scum of humanity, and ridden upon by friend and foe. This story distinguishes itself by a soaring flight of imagination. The representation of the mare, half beast and half endowed with human intelligence, now showing consciousness as regards its own wretched state and now returning to the condition of beastly insensibility; and then the episodes such as the revel in the air with Satan, though rather incoherently connected with the main story,—all this marks "The Mare" as one of the most imaginative works in literature. "The Travels

of Benjamin III" is the story of a Jewish dreamer, who sets out, with his companion, from his native town, on a quest of the lost ten tribes of Israel, who are supposed, by legend, to live somewhere beyond Sambatyon, a river unapproachable; and, after many mock-heroic adventures, the hero and his companion are caught and sold into the army. The story strongly reminds one of "Don Quixote," by which it was undoubtedly influenced. Like the latter, it is not to be regarded as the satire of an individual, but is rather a parody on the condition of the Jewish people, poor, famishing, and miserable, yet seeking the salvation of the whole world together with its own; but suffering, in the end, for the sins of others.

Finally, a word in regard to the style and literary influence of Abramovitz. In point of style, he stands between the Maskilim and the more modern writers. His form of expression is too exuberant and not precise enough for purposes of modern realism. In his endeavor to make his style as colloquial as possible, he introduced many Yiddishisms into Hebrew and made frequent use of the Talmudic phraseology, which is nearer in spirit to modern Yiddish than is the Biblical diction. Hence, in a measure, his style, like that of the Maskilim, bears the eclectic, Melizah character, yet it is racy and spirited, the Talmudic phraseology serving as a sort of seasoning for it. Its influence upon the more modern Hebrew style was, therefore, direct and fruitful. With this, however, the influence of Abramovitz is not exhausted; his humor, his treatment, his sympathy with the common people have also had their wholesome effect upon Hebrew literature. And if a concrete example of this effect be desired, it will be found in Shalom Rabinowitz.

Shalom Rabinowitz

The introductory remark made about Abramovitz, as regards his Hebrew and Yiddish productions, also holds good in the case of Shalom Rabinowitz, or, as he is best known by his nom-de-plume, Shalom Aleichem. Like Abramovitz, the latter wrote most of his works in Yiddish and later translated them into

Hebrew, in such a manner as not to betray their Yiddish original. We are thus justified in giving this author, too, a place in Hebrew literature.

In the first works of Rabinowitz we see not only the influence of Abramovitz but a direct imitation of his works. "Rabchik (a dog)," for example, strongly reminds one of "The Mare," and the same, at least, in some measure, may be said of "Methushelah." Later, Rabinowitz struck out in an independent direction, only now and then betraying the influence of the older humorist, by a simile, a passage, or a turn of phrase. There is, however, a resemblance more essential than this between the two humorists. Like Abramovitz, Rabinowitz takes his heroes from the bygone generation—though to a much greater extent—and, like the former, he does not concern himself with the psychology of his characters, but describes them, in Dickens-like manner, by a ludicrous gesture or form of expression,—a practice that, at times, degenerates with him, as with Dickens, into a mannerism.

These are, in the main, the points of resemblance between the two Jewish humorists. The points of difference are just as interesting and instructive. In the first place, there is no preachment or tendency in the stories of Shalom Aleichem, as is to be found in these of the older writer. The former has nothing to plead for his heroes. He stands aside, observes their manners, their conversation, their mode of life, and these he describes as they are, or as they present themselves before his mind's eye, with their faults, their squint and stammer humorously magnified. He seldom extends sympathy to them. Abramovitz laughs with tears in his eyes; the laugh of Shalom Aleichem is cruel, Mephistophelian. Then, again, the humor of the former is that of the great writer, of a Dickens or a Thackeray, and is not the principal aim of the author, but serves merely as a seasoning to the story, whereas the humor of Shalom Aleichem is that of the professional humorist, of a Mark Twain, which is an aim in itself. And these differences between teacher and disciple are not due to mere temperament, but are to be sought also in the

difference of period during which they lived. Abramovitz was active mainly during the time when his heroes were a part of the social order. Hence, his sketches reflect not only the single situation with which he deals, but also the whole life or, at least, an important phase of the life of the society. Shalom Aleichem lives in an age when the heroes he describes are merely an outgrowth from a previous period, almost an anachronism: the light that he throws upon them, therefore, gives the impression of the brilliancy of the sun before its setting. They can interest us only as a dying type of individuals of a dead period. See his "Kathrielians," a series of portraits that constitute a rounded whole, one of Shalom Aleichem's best works. We are, indeed, acquainted with each and every one of them individually; we know that they have existed and that they still exist. But Kathrilevke as a society, as a social order, seems to us unreal, as a thing of the past. Or, take "Tobias the Milkman,"—perhaps the masterpiece of our author,—whom he almost succeeded in endowing with psychologic individuality. Tobias is also a personage whom we know well; but, as one of a bygone age, he can hardly find himself in the society of our own time. It is then, in this absence of personal interest, in the fact that Shalom Aleichem lives outside of the atmosphere of his heroes, that we may find, at least in part, the objectivity of this humorist.

In short, the difference between the humor of Abramovitz and that of Rabinowitz may be summed up as follows: that of the former approaches the French type, which is a criticism of life; that of the latter comes near the American type, in which an external, ludicrous characteristic, a manner of expression, individual or racial, a popular saying or a current story, is seized upon, exaggerated and carried to the extent of mannerism. Such is the humor of Shalom Aleichem, and therein lies his success as well as his shortcoming.

CHAPTER VIII

THE REVIVAL MOVEMENT IN ITS NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

With the writings of Shalom Aleichem we have come down to our own time; but this writer was assigned a place in the previous chapter, because of the relation he bears to Abramovitz. He is, however, a unique figure in Hebrew literature, and can be regarded as a rather loose link in the chain of its development. If we desire to resume the thread of evolution, we must go back to the end of the eighties. At that time there came upon the scene a thinker of some power and ability—A. Ginsburg—who exerted a marked influence upon the revival movement as well as upon Hebrew literature.

Ginsburg, better known by his nom-de-plume Ahad Ha-Am (One of the People), was an active member of the movement long before 1889, but it was only in that year that he first made his appearance before the reading public. Up to that time he was unwilling, as he said, to take up the pen and become a public man. But the movement began to take a form and a direction undesirable in themselves and fraught with dangers to its future development. The economic feature was the most pronounced in it, and its activity was feverish and short sighted. Purchases of land in Palestine were made noisily, boisterously; the slightest success, real or imaginary, in the colonies in that country was exaggerated by the newspaper and the public meeting, with the good intention of turning public sentiment in favor of Palestine and the movement. The results, however, could not fail to be disastrous. During the nine years, from 1882 to 1891, some fifty thousand Jews went to settle in Palestine, most of whom were destitute, having broken with the last means of sustenance in their native countries. And there is no telling how many thousands or tens of thousands more Jews would then have poured into that land, once the flood of immigration had been

turned thither in that artificial way; and there is no telling how many thousands or tens of thousands would have been sacrificed in this manner in that agriculturally and industrially undeveloped country, had not the Porte put a stop to it, by pulling in the drawbridge in 1891, and forbidding the Jews to settle in the land.

In the midst of this feverish agitation, which swept away even such cool thinkers as Lilienblum, Ahad Ha-Am was the only one in the movement to retain his balance. In 1889, when this excitement was at its zenith, he published a couple of articles entitled: "This Is Not the Way," in which he set forth the evils of Hibbath Zion in the form which it had assumed, at the same time pointing out the direction that it should henceforth take, if it was to maintain its position as a national movement: "Hibbath Zion" has hitherto made the mistake of overemphasizing the economic and, in a manner, the political significance of the rehabilitation of Palestine by the Jews. The truth is, that this country, small in area and industrially undeveloped, cannot solve either of these Jewish problems. It can neither serve as a centripetal force to attract the eddies of wanderers driven from their homes by starvation; nor can it be a refuge for the millions of Jews persecuted in their present native lands. Any other center of immigration, say America, may serve this purpose infinitely better than Palestine. In short, this country cannot and will not solve the problem of the *Jews*, but that of *Judaism*—a dictum that has since been often quoted in literature and on the platform. Palestine is to become a center merely for Jewish culture, which has been steadily degenerating during all the years of the dispersion. And the endeavors of Hibbath Zion should be bent solely towards this aim.

This is the gist of the couple of articles published by Ahad Ha-Am in 1889; and it was a veritable bomb thrown into the camp of the adherents of the cause. It roused a storm of opposition on the part of the journalists and active "Lovers of Zion," who saw their idea of Palestine as a panacea for all Jewish ills overthrown by this novel opinion. Yet this was not the last word of Ahad Ha-Am to rouse resentment. Every article that

he subsequently published became an event to stir up commotion. Not that he was sensational or that he tried in any other way to draw the attention of the public to himself. Very few authors in any literature have been so free from the vice of courting publicity as he. It was the force of his argument, the directness of his manner, the vigor and lucidity of his style, that brought his ideas home alike to friend and foe, and that finally exalted him to the height of spiritual leader of Hibbath Zion, and made him a potent factor in Hebrew literature.

Ahad Ha-Am later developed, in a series of essays, a rounded and consistent theory of Zionism as well as of Judaism as a whole. The basis of his theory is purely cultural-nationalistic: The Jews have never been a mere religious sect, as is maintained by some, but a national entity, whether they lived in their own land or in the diaspora. In their dispersion, they entered the various countries as a distinct nationality and have always lived there as such. Their national spirit, the moral vigor, which was moulded in their own country and was so creative in the prophets, was a great preservative power to maintain the national existence of the Jews even after they had lost their political independence. In so far Ahad Ha-Am is in accord with his predecessors, by whom he was undoubtedly influenced: S. D. Luzzatto and Smolenskin, who likewise lay emphasis upon the theory that Jewish nationalism has been a fact prevalent throughout Jewish history, and who, together with another thinker of the nineteenth century, N. Krochmal, offer a spiritual interpretation of Jewish history. But he made a further contribution to the theory of Jewish nationalism. Luzzatto, himself deeply religious, and Smolenskin, theoretically religious, regarded Jewish faith as indissolubly connected with Jewish nationality; Ahad Ha-Am draws a sharp and distinguishing line between the two. It is true, he maintains, that the religion of Israel is a product of the national genius; but this merely means that the former is dependent upon the latter, not vice versa. Even the moral spirit of the Jewish people, which seems at first sight to be so inseparably welded together with religion, has in reality been an independent cre-

ative power, manifesting itself in religious forms only during the time when religion dominated national life. But, in our own time, national consciousness, which has steadily been growing among the Jewish people, can and will take the place of religion as the creator of national values. This is the contribution that Ahad Ha-Am made to the theory of Jewish nationalism. He based it purely upon sentiment, upon consciousness, freeing it from dogma and thus flinging its doors open for the free-thinker and atheist and even for one still farther removed from Judaism. And this theory presented with such trenchant logic, and in phrases and expression as striking and pregnant as those of Matthew Arnold, could not but act as a stimulant to Hebrew thought. There is no exaggeration in saying that Ahad Ha-Am dominated Hebrew literature in the decade between 1890 and 1900.

The year 1891 may be regarded as a landmark in modern Hebrew literature. In that year, the latter began to assume an entirely European character. Shalkowitz, known by the pseudonym Ben-Avigdor, commenced to issue a series of stories, sketches, and poems, under the name of "Sifre Agorah" (Penny Series), to which there contributed, besides the editor himself, some of the most talented Hebrew writers. The intrinsic value of this series is by no means great. Not one of the contributions rises above mediocrity, and in the realistic sketches of the editor himself there is too much conventionality and too minute and oppressive detail. Yet its success was immediate and decisive. The manner of publication was in itself something novel in Hebrew; whereas the realism of the series was hailed as a new gospel, and it contributed its mite towards the establishment of realism in the literature as a whole. Its fame, moreover, went even beyond the limits of the Hebrew; for some of the sketches of this series were translated into other languages, both as illustrative of modern tendencies in Hebrew literature and as representative pictures of Jewish life. Furthermore, this publication later developed and branched off into two important publishing companies, "Ahiasaf" and "Tushiah, "which have

done good work towards the uplifting and aggrandizing of Hebrew literature in every respect. And that all this was done under the direct influence of Ahad Ha-Am may well be attested by the fact that Ben-Avigdor dedicated to him one of his sketches, "Moses," drawing a comparison between Ahad Ha-Am and the Biblical leader.

The writer who introduced the ideas of Ahad Ha-Am into fiction was, however, Mordecai Z. Feierberg. The heritage that he bequeathed Hebrew literature is rather small; it consists of a longer story and a few smaller sketches, which were the result of three years of literary activity, for he died very early, at the age of twenty five. But in these few productions is revealed a talent of considerable power, a personal note of yearning towards the great and the noble, a soul quivering with emotion and idealism.

Feierberg nourishes his offspring, pelican-like, with his own life's blood. There is an unrelieved subjectivity in his writings, which read somewhat like an autobiography. Here is the easily impressed, gentle child of the Ghetto, with his plastic mind, who is frightened into bad dreams by Jewish legend, but who is cured by the magic power of an amulet ("The Amulet"). Here is his little world, full of misery in the Ḥeder and at home ("In the Dark of Night"): and there again is the flutter of the emotions of the child poet at the knowledge that his beloved calf is to be killed before her eight days' grace are over, and who staunchly believes in supernatural intervention ("The Calf"). And there, again, the same "Hafni the Dreamer" is growing accustomed to "loving the night and the shadows," because then he can test opinions and theories that run perhaps cross-grained to those of his previous studies, but that fill him at the same time with inextinguishable hunger after light and life ("Shadows"). Finally, observe the passionate, personal "Whither," which, together with "In the Dark of Night," secured Feierberg his place in Hebrew literature.

"In the Dark of Night" is based upon the legend of a Jewish boy who was taken by force in his infancy to the house of a

Polish nobleman and brought up there in ignorance of his origin; but, coming to the age of reason, he is urged by his dead father to return to the fold,—and the boy acts accordingly. With Feierberg, however, this story assumes a symbolic character, alluding to the story of the last few decades of external influences and internal struggle in Jewry, and with the issue still in the balance. Here is the Ghetto child, gifted and studious, but allured, forcibly drawn, by the richer and more varied life without; however, at last awakening to self-consciousness, he returns to his own people. But this return can after all not be complete. He has tasted too much of the light without to be satisfied with the stifling atmosphere within. The contest between these sentiments is great and tragic; but the victory seems to be on the side of the inner self, of the Jewish national self-consciousness.

"Whither" is, in a measure, supplementary to "In the Dark"; it answers the question which the latter leaves unanswered: the complete harmony between the Jew in the man and the man in the Jew is possible only in one way, in the building up of a perfect Jewish center in the ancestral land. The hero of this story is really no new figure in Hebrew literature. He is a heritage of the Haskalah novel. His history is that of the heroes of the latter; for, like them, Nahman was brought up upon the Talmud, and, like them, he revolts, after having come in contact with a broader knowledge and culture, against its autocratic hold of Jewish life and mind. But there is something in the make-up of the hero of "Whither" that stamps him as an original creation, and, at the same time, as a child of the transition period in the history of European Jewry. In the first place, his revolt is deeper and more comprehensive than that of the Haskalah heroes. It goes beyond the religion of his people; the whole mode of Jewish life is unbearable to him. He could, therefore, not be satisfied with a few reforms in the Law, but would seek an entirely new modus for his people. Secondly, there is in this story a high pitch of passion and a psychologic analysis entirely foreign to the Haskalah literature. And, in

order to complete the comparison or the contrast between "Whither" and the Haskalah novel, it may be pointed out that, in spite of the fact that the former is also a problem story, it is yet remarkably free from the bane of tendency. The problem with which Feierberg deals and the solution that he gives to it—a solution given in the spirit of Ahad Ha-Am's theory—are not simply a system of thought, but are grown together with his whole being. Hence, the impression that "Whither" makes is that of a palpable reality, the psychologic struggle of its hero being not the conflict of abstract ideas, but the flutter of a living soul in constant state of agitation.

We have seen that the psychologic element is prevalent in Feierberg's sketches. This feature marks him as a representative of the more modern spirit in Hebrew literature. For it is with the rise of Jewish national consciousness that the real emancipation of the individual in fiction began. In the Haskalah period, with all its conflict for the freedom of the individual, it was, after all, the spirit, the moral, the sentiment of a class that permeated the Hebrew. In Smolenskin, the Maskil of his time, though there was some character drawing, it was still done offhandedly, unconsciously, imperfectly. Even with Abramovitz, who was, in spirit, still farther removed from that period, characters presented types rather than individuals. It is only with the revival that the latter received their full recognition.

Another important feature of contemporary Hebrew literature is its favorable attitude towards Hasidism. This is not due merely to religious tolerance, which has become a matter of course in contemporary Jewish life; but has a deeper literary significance. In the first place, Hasidism is more subjective than its rival creed, "Mithnagdism;" its saints have displayed more individuality and its adherents more life and character. The modern writer of the story could, therefore, find a richer harvest of material in Hasidism than elsewhere. Then, again, the symbolistic movement, which has been infiltrated into contemporary Hebrew literature, could also find more scope in Hasidism, which has a Kabbalistic undercurrent.

One of the most representative of this individualistic and symbolistic spirit, a writer whose fame went beyond the limits of Hebrew literature, is I. L. Peretz. This author, like Abramovitz and Shalom Aleichem, has written most of his works in Yiddish, translating them later into Hebrew, and like them he generally takes his themes and characters from the life of a bygone age, seldom attempting to portray a modern man or describe a modern situation. But there is a vast difference between him and the other two writers. In the first place, they are primarily humorists, which he is not. Their humor flows easily, unrestrainedly. If they exaggerate and caricaturize, it is the exaggeration and the caricature of the humorist, of the Micawber and the Pickwickian type. Peretz can not create a humorous character or situation; his humor, whenever he employs any, is forced, far-fetched. Witness, for example, "The Heritors of Pharaoh," "Venus and Shulamith," or "My Uncle Shachna and My Aunt Yahna,"—all of which are intended for humorous sketches. What do they provoke? Surely, not a hearty laugh, but a doubtful smile. A more fundamental difference, however, between the two humorists and Peretz is, that the former are writers of manner not of personality, whereas the latter is much more a delineator of character, of psychologic states of mind, than of manners. Take his "Pictures of Travel" —in the provincial towns of Russia. How much a Heine, an Abramovitz, a Shalom Aleichem could have made of them! With Peretz, however, they appear tame and sober, and, in places, lifeless. His psychologic studies, on the other hand, particularly in some pathologic phases, bespeak the great master. The hero of "A Night of Terror" is torn between two conflicting sentiments. He has inherited both the gentleness, the yielding weakness of his mother and the business ferocity of his father. And these traits, antagonistic to each other, come to a real clash after his marriage, when the love of gain and his affection for his gentle, pleading wife, herself the type of his mother, stand in the way of each other and make him hesitate as to what course to take,—an indecision that finally kills his beloved wife. The

hero of "The Charitable Man" makes his escape from his native town, the poor of which know him too well, not because he begrudges them the few rubles he spends on them, but because he loathes their beggarly manner of approaching him for an alms. In "Yosele Yeshibah Bahur," the unsatisfied sexual desire of the hero leads him to suicide; and in "His Defense" a father, who killed his daughter because she had gone astray, pleads not guilty, maintaining that he did not slay his daughter, who was innocent and still alive, but her shadow, her bad semblance. Finally, witness the masterly sketch "Who Am I?",—the tangled and confused thoughts of a half madman. Read all this, and you will see with what force and truth Peretz is capable of depicting important psychological moments.

From the sketches cited above, one can see that Peretz has a preference for the abnormal, whether as a psychologic entity or as a specific mood. These abnormalities he follows to the innermost recesses of the soul, and in that camera obscura he lays bare before us the minutiae of its struggles and agitations. For, with Peretz, the human drama, the play of emotions, is but seldom acted without; it is generally played within. His psychologic sketches are not stories in the real sense of the word, but studies; and the more the subject is out of the ordinary, the worthier it is of study. As such he also takes the life of the Hasidim. In the stories of that life there is no apotheosis of Hasidism, as you may find in the stories of other modern Hebrew writers. In Peretz there is to be found an undercurrent of irony, which is at times displeasing and out of accord with the subject. And the reason is apparent. Peretz is in reality of aristocratic inclinations; the democracy shown in his works is not inherent in him,—it is strained. He always takes his stand on an elevation, from which he looks down upon his heroes. He can, therefore, not regard them without some prejudice, such as comes from a natural haughtiness and artificial condescension.

The defects found in the Hasidaic stories of Peretz stand out more glaringly in his "Folk Stories," a series of popular tales and legends of Jewish saints. In these stories, the popular style is

forced, the simplicity of narration artificial, and one can almost discover a knowing squint in them. In spite of all this, however, Peretz is at his best in these "Folk Stories." His imagination is here given full play and almost always kept at a soaring height. By reason of this, as well as by a certain charm of narration, the stories succeed in transporting us into the world of legend.

Judah Steinberg (1863–1908)

In the works of Peretz, as we have seen, the triumph of the individual is not yet complete. Peretz is a master in the delineation of the complicated, the abnormal; he hardly ever attempts to portray a normal character, a complete personality. The individual in Hebrew fiction has first found complete and varied representation in the writings of Judah Steinberg. This author began to write late in life and died after a very short period of literary activity; and yet he bequeathed to Hebrew literature a heritage considerable in bulk as well as in quality. His stories and sketches are marked by a grasp and compass of individuality and by a variety of psychological study surpassing those of any other Hebrew writer. Not that his works are always above mediocrity. It was inevitable in a writer whose output was intensive and uninterrupted to produce, at times, quantity at the expense of quality. But even his weaker productions give the impression not of a lack of talent, but merely of an absence of finish due to overhastiness in workmanship; for even they, to say the least, introduce a psychologic problem or present an outline, a skeleton of individual character.

Steinberg is one of the sincerest, most direct, and most penetrating of short story writers. He neither seeks effect nor mystery; but paints life as it is, and paints it truly, sincerely. Yet there is no superficiality in his presentation of life and the individual. In the stories of Steinberg, as in those of Henry James, we find the multifarious nuances of character sketched with remarkable truth and delicacy. Witness, for example, his longer story "Father and Son," and you will see with what fineness of touch he lays bare every secret fold of the human heart. Every

psychologic turn takes us by surprise, seems almost a mood rather than a state of mind or sentiment; and yet it is convincingly true, as true as in the stories of James. Or, again, take the small story "Mordecai Kizler." This also is given rather a surprising turn at the end, but a turn entirely original in its conception. In this story, Steinberg describes a rich merchant of forceful and tyrannical character, who, half from inclination, half at the bidding of his Hasidaic saint, overwhelms his employees with gifts, in season and out of season, at the same time, however, robbing them of all initiative and independence of mind. But the time comes when this strong will must bend before one still more powerful. The merchant gets a new employee, who refuses, "on principle," to take any gift from his master and thereby surrender his individuality. Kizler cannot rid himself of this servant, as he stands in need of the latter, more than the latter of him. Under these circumstances, one might expect the conventional climax: a clash of wills, perhaps some sort of tragedy. But Steinberg does nothing of the kind. With artistic skill, he tones down these two strong wills, when brought together, to a conflict with themselves rather than with each other. The business of the proud merchant, Mordecai Kizler, has of late been going somewhat awry, and, in addition, his daughter is dangerously ill. Superstitious as he is, he imagines that all this has happened as a punishment because he has not completely carried out the bidding of his saint, to be generous towards his employees, as there is still one to whom he has not been able to extend his liberality. He, therefore, decides that on the next holiday he will insist upon Gisnet, his employee, accepting a present from him. "If I cannot compel him, I shall try to ask him, to implore him . . . After all he is not a brute." And the story winds up with the following dramatic scene:

"And he stands bowed down before Gisnet, like a person begging for his life.

—Take it! What will you lose by it? It is of great importance! I can not reveal the matter to you. You would not believe it. Please accept!

Gisnet looks in confusion at his imploring master. He can neither yield nor refuse:

—I cannot, sir, it's against my principles.

—Please do accept!

—But my principles!

—It's a question of life and death!

—Is it so important that you would have me act against my principles?

—Please accept!

—But my principles!

Both suddenly became aware of an imploring gentleness in each other's voice, a gentleness unusual with them up to that time. And they were dumbfounded."

From the sketch cited above, another characteristic feature of Steinberg is to be noticed. He often places characters in juxtaposition, that affect or supplement each other, with the result that they bring each other into relief or exert a wholesome mutual influence. Thus, the niggard and the lavish persons are well contrasted in "Hezekiah Kuzner"; the nobility of character of "Leibush Bulgar" is brought out by that of his wife; fickleness and solidity of mind are marvelously typified in "Two Young Women." See also, in this respect, "Shlome Harif," "A Groan," and "Dan Mirsky."

The characters of Steinberg are endowed with a charm but seldom to be met with in modern Hebrew fiction,—a charm due to a naivety, an integrity of belief, and an attachment to principle —characteristics with which they distinguish themselves. It would be tautology to speak of these traits when his stories of the life of the Hasidim are treated, inasmuch as naivety is basic in this life, in its spiritual side, in the unquestioned and persistent belief of the Hasidim, for example, in the godliness and infallibility of their saints. It may be pointed out, however, that this quality holds good in these stories not only as regards the beliefs and superstitions of the sect but also in respect to their individual life. For, here, too, it is not the symbol, the mysticism that interests Steinberg, but the living personality. Hence, the Hasidaic stories of this author are equally distant from the

disparaging descriptions of the Maskilim and the idealizing of the symbolists.

The stories of Steinberg, then, present, in one way, the culminating point of the evolution of individuality in Hebrew fiction. There are very few problematic natures among his heroes; and the Weltschmerz, that which expresses itself through individual unrest and suffering, has not found strong utterance in his characters. But, on the other hand, there is a wealth of individualities in the works of Steinberg; for this author hardly ever repeats himself, hardly ever offers an old character overhauled for a new creation. And all this he presents to us in a style lucid, fluent, convincing, without posing and without the slightest shade of mystic obscurity.

CHAPTER IX

CONTEMPORARY HEBREW POETRY

H. N. Bialik

The poems of Bialik are marked by pathos, loftiness of conception, and artistic beauty. Their pathos never degenerates into sentimentality, but is of a sort that, coupled with virility and strength of expression, makes a Byron or a Victor Hugo, and wedded to seriousness and loftiness of idealism, gives birth to the preacher and the prophet. And Bialik possesses these qualities in a high degree. He is, with the possible exception of Jehudah Halevi—a Hebrew poet of the Middle Ages—the most representative Jewish national poet, inheriting the pathetic idealism and the prophetic seriousness of his people; at the same time giving full expression to the national grief, and, to some extent, to the national aspirations.

Bialik's poems may generally be divided into national and universal, each division presenting its own peculiarities. In his national poems, he only at rare occasions tunes his lyre to a joyous melody. His muse is not the bright being of Goethe's poems, revealing herself when "Der junge Tag erhob sich mit entzücken," and imparting to the poet her cheerful mood: "Sie lächelte, da war ich schon genesen; zu neuen Freuden stieg mein Geist heran." The Hebrew muse reveals herself to our poet:

> "In a darksome nook, in mournful mood,
> And robed in garb of widowhood."

It is a woebegone muse such as this that bestows her poetic gifts upon our Hebrew poet; his national poems are, therefore, sullenly passionate and eloquently pathetic.

It is not, however, a Jeremiah that we discover in the national poems of Bialik, one sitting on the ruins of Jerusalem and helplessly lamenting the desolation. Nor is it a paitan (mediaeval

Hebrew hymn writer) imploring the God of Israel for revenge against the enemies of his people. It is the fire-giving Prometheus, rising to his full strength and consciousness and tearing at his shackles, that reveals himself to us in Bialik's verse. It is the Jewish genius, who had been sitting for centuries, silent and hopeless, on the ruins of his people, but who has risen when the measure was filled and the misery no longer endurable, and has thrown the gauntlet both to man and God. In one of his finest, though obscurest, poems, "The Fiery Scroll," Bialik chisels in verbal marble the image of this national genius:

"On the ruins, robed in pillars of smoke, his feet resting on dust and ashes, his head weighed down with the burden of grief, he sits, mute and desolate, gazing before him on Jerusalem laid waste. The wrath of the universe is gathered on his brow and eternal silence is congealed in his eye. And one groan, subdued and deep, rose from the extremity of the world and rolled along and brake in the silence of the weeping. It was the heart of the world that brake. And the Lord could suppress his grief no longer. And he sprang up, uttering a cry that rang over all the worlds, and broke away from the ruins and came into hiding . . . ."

Such intensity of passion and dark mood of protest pervades almost all of Bialik's national poems; but they rise to their highest expression in the "Poems of Wrath," a series written on the occasion of the Kishineff massacre in 1903. For obvious reasons, the main poem of the series, "In the City of Slaughter," with its three hundred lines of heroic verse, can not be given here. Suffice it to remark that for passion and strength of expression it can be equalled only by the calamity it describes. An attempt is here made, however, to render the last, shorter, poem of the series:

"I ween in weary night starlike will I be extinct,
  Leaving no trace of my grave;
But fumes volcano-like my wrath after me will emit,
  When its flames are subdued
And continue as long as the thunderbolt peals in the sky
  And surges rage in the ocean.

O, would that your woe and distressing were treasured entire
In the bosom of earth,
And the wastes of the skies and the wastes of the field, verdure
And stars therewith be watered,
And live therein and quicken them and grow old and be renewed and
fade
And again blossom with them.
And nameless and formless and landless the outrage ye suffered,
Shall abide to the last generation
And voiceless to heaven and hell may it howl and delay
The redemption of mankind.
And when at the end of the world, the sun of justice deceitful
Will shine on the graves of your slain,
And the banner of falsehood with insolence skyward will flutter
O'er the heads of your slaughterers,
And the counterfeit seal of the Lord engraved on the banner
Will dazzle the eye of the sun,
And the haughty feet capering and jubilee of festival lying
Will shake your holy frames in the grave,—
The splendor of heaven shall darken and the sun shall be turned
Into a stain of your innocent blood,
Cain's token on the brow of the world and a token
Of the weakness of God's broken arm.
And each star shall quake to his neighbor: Here is the terrible lie;
Here is the unutterable sorrow!
And the God of revenge, wounded and heartsore, shall arise,
And go forth with bright, flaming sword."

Bialik is preëminently the poet of the woe of his people; to the national hopes and aspirations he but seldom gives expression in his verse. When he does so, however, his vehemence of emotion is transformed into majestic sereneness, calling, like a deutero-Isaiah, for the revival of his people, inspiriting the vanguard of the national rejuvenation, and severely chastising the sluggish:

"Rise, ye wanderers of the desert, depart from the wilderness! The road is still distant and fiercely rages the battle.—Barely forty years have we been wandering among the mountains, and in the sand have we buried sixty myriad corpses. But regret we not the carcasses of the sluggish, dead in their slavishness—leap we over the slain! Let them rot in their disgrace, stretched

over their packs which from Egypt on their shoulders they bore.—The sun will rejoice to shed his rays for the first time over a mighty generation.—Rise, then, ye wanderers and abandon the desert.—Every one hear the voice of the Lord in his own heart. Proceed, ye pass to-day to a new land!" And when the response to the poet's appeal does not keep apace with his impatience:

"Verily, grass is the people, like unto a desiccated tree! Verily, a carcass is the people! For the voice of the Lord is thundering here and there, and they do not rise lion-like and they do not stir.—They are leaves fallen from the tree, moss growing on a knoll, barren vines, faded blossoms. Will the dew revive them? And when the clarion will sound and the banner be raised, will the dead ones awake, will the dead ones stir?"

Bialik is, however, capable not only of vehemence of passion, but also of infinite tenderness. None of the Hebrew poets has grasped and represented so well the spirit of the Ghetto and its poetry as he, and none has shown so much sympathy and so much tenderness of feeling for the departing spirit of the Ghetto as he. Read his "On the Threshold of the Beth Hamidrash" (the last resort of the study of sacred literature in accordance with Jewish tradition), "The Midnight Prayer," "The Talmudic Student,"—his first longer poem, by which his fame was established,—and particularly the little gem of a poem: "In Solitude,"—a lament of the Shechinah, the old spirit of the Ghetto, at being bereaved of her children, whom "the wind is carrying off and the light is sweeping away" one by one. Read all these simultaneously with his other, passionate poems, and you will see how Bialik is capable of giving expression to the whole gamut of feeling.

The poetic activity of Bialik is, however, by no means confined to national themes. It is true that for pathos and prophetic grandeur one must turn to his national poems; but loftiness of conception and artistic beauty we can find mainly in his other verse. Not that he is here infallible. His verse seldom attains the music of a Poe or a Swinburne; and in his descriptions of

nature he at times overreaches himself. He is too subjective, too much the pent-up child of the Ghetto let loose, communing too eloquently with mother nature. He could hardly describe, at one stroke, a single mood of nature, such as, for example, the famous little poem of Goethe, beginning "Auf allen Gipfeln" presents. Bialik's horizon is too expansive for a description like this, the flux and reflux of light and shadow too rapid with him, and his spontaneity too vigorous and too little restrained. He manifests in his nature poems a wealth of delightful similes and metaphors and a richness of glowing colors reminding one of the Venetian school of painters; but these qualities sometimes mar, by their very profusion, the picture as a whole. Again, in his amatory poems, though manifesting a good deal of vivacity and delicacy, he is yet too playful, dallying too much with love to impress us with the seriousness of his passion. In his series of "Folk Poems," however, there are some very beautiful love verses, of which the following may serve as an illustration:

"Evening, night, and dreary morn,
I raise my eyes to the clouds forlorn;
Sweet clouds, dear clouds, tell me true,
Is not my love yet come to woo?"

The real greatness of Bialik as a consummate artist is, however, manifest in those poems in which he alights upon a central figure or idea as the theme of his poem. As such are, among others, "The Pigmies," "The Lake," and, preëminently, "The Dead of the Desert." The first is based upon the fairy tale of the mountain genii digging treasures in the dead of night. It is a poem not exceeding seventeen quatrain stanzas; but in delicacy of touch and harmony of rhythm it, perhaps, surpasses anything Bialik has written. He here succeeds in shedding a soft, dreamy light upon the midnight scene and the dwarfs at work, wrapping both in delightful enchantment. "The Lake," a description of nature in many moods, as reflected in the waters of the lake, is a masterpiece both as regards imagery and scenery. Finally, "The Dead of the Desert" is a real creation of genius, both for grandeur of conception and magnificance of form. This poem

is based upon a Talmudic legend concerning the last generation that had been in bondage in Egypt, and died, according to tradition, one and all, in the wilderness. The Talmudic legend, always fond of exaggerating the mental and physical capacities of the Jewish ancestors, represents the Dead of the Desert as giants, whom the wrath of the Lord alone could strike down. They are stretched, sixty myriad strong, in a secluded dale hardly accessible to mortals, with faces upturned and bodies so hardened by sand and storm as to resist the talon of the eagle and the claw of the lion. They are, moreover, regarded as sacred; to touch their property is quite fatal. And Bialik, taking up this legend, has given it a universal significance, and has treated it with such dramatic power and artistic beauty, both in description of scenery and in majesty of verse, that the poem may be ranked among the masterpieces of the world's literature.

The poem is divided into four main parts: (1) The description of the dead lying stretched at full length and in their whole strength. (2) A series of scenes in which the kings of the birds, beasts, and reptiles: the eagle, the lion, and the serpent, successively make vain attacks upon them. (3) The succeeding silence of the desert, followed by its rising, in all its desolate might, "to avenge the waste" that the Lord has imposed upon it, and the simultaneous rise of the dead, in their grim titanic power, against the decree that they die in the desert and be not admitted to the holy land. (4) The desert is, however, soon appeased, and the dead return to their former state of passivity. And in the silence, there appears in the distance an Arabian rider, who, detached from his caravan, is borne along by his swift courser in the direction of the Dead. But, amazed, he darts back to his companions, telling them of his adventure. Whereupon, the Sheikh relates marvellous stories regarding "the people of the book." "And the Arabs listen and the fear of Allah is inscribed on the faces. And they pace leisurely beside their heavily laden camels. And for a long time their white turbans gleam on the horizon and the hump of the camels gently swing

and then disappear in the bright distance, as if they bore hence an ancient legend on their backs."

It is hardly necessary to draw attention to the grandeur of conception which is apparent in the mere outline of the poem. One scene will, however, be rendered here, that of the attack of the serpent on the Dead, a scene illustrating Bialik's great power of description:

"And then, when the desert grows faint in the noon heat,
A tiger snake, beam-like, of the serpents gigantic,
Crawls out to bask in the sun the rings of his tender, sleek body.
Now he coils up in the sand, lies still, neither moves nor breathes,
All melting in the softness and splendor, inhaling the great glory of light,
And now he rises and stretches, and exposes his length to the sun,
Opening his mouth to his brilliance, and gleaming in his gold scaly coat,
Like the only spoiled child of the desert, fondled and caressed, he appears then.

Of a sudden—up starts the serpent, darts from his place and crawls on,
Gliding, writhing, and shuffling on the face of the sand heaps, the scorching.
He meets the array of the corpses, ceases his hissing and is silent;
Raises the third part of his body, like a column clad hieroglyphic.
Darts his crest forward, the golden, with neck stretched and wondering eyes.
Scans from extreme to extreme the array of the foe in sweet slumber.
And vast is the army and numerous the bodies there lying in repose,
With faces bared towards heaven and brows knit fiercely and frowning.
And the hatred, the ancient, deep cherisned since Adam, up flashes
Into green flame in the piercing snaky twain eyes, the fixéd,
And a quiver of ill passion thrills through him from fangs to his wriggling tail tip.

And behold him eagerly bending, wrathful and all aflutter,
Like a rod of munition o'er the neighboring sleepers suspended,
His hydra head with vengeful designing and viper-like hissing is curved,
Quivering, wrathful, and glowing are the twain swarthy forks of his tongue.

Of a sudden, the serpent is startled, withdrawing his body the loathsome,—
Startled by the calmness majestic and the powerful splendor in slumber;
Darts back his full length and o'ertopples and writhes aside and moves onward,
Hissing and hobbling and sparkling in the bright distance, the gleaming.
And silence once more is prevailing; and stretched lie the mighty, unpestered.

In the poems of Bialik we find the influence of Ahad Ha-Am's ideas and of previous poetic productions, notably those of Gordon, as regards style and form. The influence of the latter is, however, traceable only in his earlier poems. When he began to feel the strength of his own wings, his flight became entirely independent of any model. His pathos, the vigor of his expression, his richness of style, and the beauty and variety of his meter,—all this has greatly affected modern Hebrew poetry. His influence has, however, been not only literary, but also educational. He has edited a juvenile as well as a popular series of books, has simplified the Hebrew Bible for the use of beginners and published a classified and modernized edition of the Agadic legends and sayings, and has done similar useful educational work which has served as a model for other writers.

Saul Tschernihovsky

Tschernihovsky stands next to Bialik in importance in contemporary Hebrew poetry. He began his poetic career about the same time as Bialik, and he is perhaps the only Hebrew poet who does not stand under the influence of the latter, but who, on the contrary, was partly imitated by him in at least one respect, in meter. Tschernihovsky was, moreover, the first to introduce into Hebrew poetry what had hitherto been lacking therein—enjoyment of life and an admiration for the Greek spirit. This fact is due not solely to temperament, but also to education. For, while Bialik enjoyed a thoroughly Hebrew education, in the old sense of the term, Tschernihovsky was

brought up in a European manner and far from the pulsating life of the Ghetto. Hence, the difference between the two both in poetic note and in sympathies. In Bialik the tone is generally grave, dismal, and, at times, protesting and querulous. The erotic sentiment does not occupy a prominent place with him; and if any sort of enjoyment is to be found in his poems, it is only delight in nature. In Tschernihovsky, with all his Jewish gravity of tone, there is yet hardly anything morose or dismal. The enjoyment of life is complete in his poems. It is keen, intense, comprising besides the joys of nature, also the essentials of the creed of every good epicurean: wine and women.

This consideration of difference between the two poets,—a difference due to education and environment as well as temperament, may be extended still further. Bialik, brought up in the Ghetto, though himself, as a modern man, renouncing its life, yet expresses, at times, a yearning for it, its poetry, its moral grandeur. Tschernihovsky has no understanding for it; his sympathies lie far beyond it. This difference cannot be illustrated more clearly than by citing the following characteristic verses from the two poets respectively:

"And once more, my beth midrash (Talmudic academy), with bowed head like a beggar and desolate like thyself, do I stand upon thy threshold. Shall I weep for thy waste or shall I weep for my own, or shall I mourn for both?" (Bialik: "On the Threshold of the Beth Midrash.")

"I have come to thee, God long since forgotten, God of ancient times and other days.—I bow before life, might, and beauty. I bow before all delight, which the carcasses of men, life's foes, snatched out of the hands of the Almighty, the God of the enchanted desert, the God who had conquered the Canaanites by storm, but who was bound by them with the straps of Phylacteries—." (Tschernihovsky: "Before the Image of Apollo.")

This difference between them is even more strikingly illustrated by their nature and love poems. In Bialik the erotics are incidental, imagined rather than experienced; with Tschernihovsky, they quiver with real life, and the fragrance of love is, moreover, interwoven even with those poems that are not pri-

marily erotic. Again, the broad perspective in the nature verse of Bialik, the unbounded panorama, the "high heaven," the abundance of light and brilliancy of color, the infinite delight in nature and implicit surrender to it,—all this betrays the Ghetto child let loose for the first time to enjoy the beauties of nature. Hence he often loses control over his material. Tschernihovsky lacks all this abandon; his communion with nature is a more orderly one. For him it is the most natural thing in the world to take a stroll in the fields, pick a flower and put it into one's button-hole, or make a wreath of roses to adorn the tresses of one's beloved. No Ghetto wall ever shut off light from him or stood between him and nature. His contemplation of it is, therefore, calmer, though much less exalted than that of Bialik; his pictures of nature, at least, in one of its moods, are, at times, better rounded in themselves. See, for example, the following beautiful little poem which has in the original the additional merit of showing nature perfectly at rest in the first stanza and changing to sudden movement in the second:

"Evening"

"From the mountain sides
The shadow softly glides,
Playing in the golden brook.
The ripple lies dreaming.
The sickle down is beaming—
Hush and silence in every nook.

The north star flashing glows,
Zephyr gently blows,
Warbles in the brooklet stream
And nestles in the rushes.
Lo! there a cherub flashes,
To heaven borne in a starry beam."

See, moreover, such poems as "Splendor" and "Nocturno," by Bialik and Tschernihovsky respectively, and the contrast will be striking enough and illustrative enough.

These are the achievements of Tschernihovsky in the domain of Hebrew poetry: the perfect, well rounded picture of nature in,

at least, one of its moods, the adoration of the Greek spirit, and love as an integral part of poetry. This, and something else: the poetic form. Tschernihovsky entered Hebrew literature almost as a foreign element, bringing along with him European influences. His themes have now and then a European local color; some of his love poems, such as: "I Dreamed the Lay of a Nightingale," "And Your Name I Carry on the Wings of Song," "Everything Is Forgotten," etc., are distinctly Heinesque, and in his poem "Ideal," unless it be mere coincidence, the influence can be traced as far back as Petrarch. With Hebrew models thus disregarded and with influences brought from foreign literatures, Tschernihovsky could not but bring in a system of meter and rime not before used in the Hebrew. There is, therefore, in his verse a variety of rhythm wielded with so much grace and force, that even Bialik could not withstand their charm, not to mention the minor poets. In diction, too, though not so great a master of the language as Bialik, he is yet more independent of preceding models, his style thus being entirely his own.

With this the poetic range of Tschernihovsky is exhausted. His national lyrics and his poems of protest distinguish themselves by their beauty rather than by their strength or pathos. Of his narratives, "Mordecai and Yoakhim" possesses delightful humor interwoven with a satiric vein, reflecting on conditions in Russia; "On a Hot Day" manifests penetration into the life of the child, and "Baruch of Mayence" distinguishes itself by its pathos. The last mentioned is, in fact, the most poetic of his longer narratives, and this because of its lyrical outpourings, for Tschernihovsky is essentially a lyric not an epic poet. And though all of these narratives are written not without talent; they are, on the whole, too prosy and too unimaginative to be good epics.

In brief, the talent of Tschernihovsky is supplementary to that of Bialik. He sings of the man in the Jew, just as the latter sings of the Jew in the man. He introduced into Hebrew poetry the sense of enjoyment of life, and he has the merit of having brought in a variety of meter hitherto unused in the language.

Other Hebrew Poets

Jacob Cohen is a tender and impressionable poet. He is an idealist and his verse is ethereal, in both of which characteristics he resembles Shelley, though his poems lack Shelley's strength and beauty. He displays some originality of conception, particularly in the poems: "The Face of the Lord," "Concerning the Frogs," "Lilith,"—the last being suggestive of Swinburne's "Laus Veneris." As for strength, it is to be sought in his poems of protest, such as "Birionim," in which, it may be remarked, the influence of Bialik, both in rhythm and mode of expression, is keenly felt.

Diametrically opposite in poetic temperament is Z. Schneer. He is no idealist and his themes are real and palpable. He is only indirectly affected by the wave of national revival. There is, at times, a gentle pessimistic vein in his poems; one must not overestimate, however, the sincerity of this gloomy conception of life in a young poet such as Schneer, but great margin should be left, in this respect, for the fashion of the age. For true pessimism would be quite irrelevant to the poet's rapture in the rays of the sun and with the passionately erotic element in poems such as "A Confession" and "Thus Do We Kiss"; moreover, at least in one place he plays the traitor to his pessimism, in the "Vision of Man," where man is foretold to conquer not only nature but God himself, and to become as creative as he. As for the quality of Schneer's verse, it is full of life and beauty; the rhythm has harmony and tunefulness, the imagery is rich, varied, and striking, and the movement quick and bold.

Besides his lyrics, Schneer has written also a couple of longer poems, in the grandiose, epic style and meter, à la Bialik; but these have, on the whole, been a failure,—for Schneer is too quick and buoyant for the epic style. His prose, on the other hand, some of which was obviously written in imitation of the liveliest and most playful prose writer in Hebrew, Katzenelson, is marked by life and beauty.

Of the minor poets—and their name is legion—may be

mentioned Jacob Steinberg, who is rather dreary and monotonous both as regards meter and tone. A vein of sadness pervades all his poems, the kind of sadness that is, at least partly, due to the lack of real creativeness. He is, at times, obscure, symbolistic, especially when necessary for purposes of rime or meter. He has one single master passion, love, a draft upon the world of emotion, which he changes into small coin, some of which have the true ring of silver and gold, but most of them have the hollow jingle of mere dross.

If in Steinberg we find, at least, some depth and seriousness of emotion, we look in vain for them in I. Katzenelson. This writer is, as indicated above, the most playful Hebrew prose master, and this playfulness we also find in his poems. Hardly one serious mood or scenic description, hardly one serious sentiment do we discover in them. His theme is a tit-bit of natural scenery and a flitting, momentary emotion, which are done in a fanciful rather than in an imaginative manner. And yet, Katzenelson's poems please by their very playfulness, by their "nonsense verse," by their lilt, lightness, and jerkiness.

Katzenelson has also written some dramas of considerable literary importance.

Jacob Fichman is more promising as a critic than as a poet. His verse is elegant and his tone is subdued. He never stirs in us any deeper emotion than sympathy. His descriptions of the dawn and the twilight during the different seasons of the year possess more of the quality of painting than of poetry; yet they have some perspicuity and are boldly drawn.

Thus, lyric poetry has been the strongest point in modern Hebrew literature, excelling all other literary branches in personal expression and artistic workmanship. In this domain, the literary powers, at least with the greatest representative of our time, Bialik, evolved out of themselves, hardly aided by any outside influence. We, therefore, have in Hebrew lyric poetry the highest expression of the age both of the individual and the national personality.

CHAPTER X

RETROGRESSION AND PROGRESS

The period of revival, that of exalted hopes and ardent desires, in the eighties, was followed by a time of gloom and disappointment. The Hibbath Zion movement had been too prodigal in promises, which it could not make good. The hopes that it had aroused were not realized, and the progress it was making was in inverse proportion to the Jewish misery and the longing for self-emancipation which the movement itself had awakened. The young generation, imbued with national pride, found the atmosphere of the Ghetto too stifling and its four walls too narrow for their human and national aspirations. They were striving out into the wide world, which was beckoning to them and tempting them on, there where one could walk with head erect and the hitherto pent up emotions be given full sway. But when they came to that wide, tempting world, they met with the usual rebuff, and, disappointed, they had to retreat, withdrawing into their own dark selves. The strain was, it is true, relaxed under the influence of the daughter movement of Hibbath Zion, political Zionism, which again kindled high hopes within the breast of the Jew; but this was merely a momentary alleviation, to be soon set at nought by the self-refutation of the movement and by a consequent disappointment.

All this has had its undoubted effect upon the shaping of contemporary Hebrew fiction, notably the story and the novel. But there were also other important factors that contributed to its make-up. The influence of Russian literature and the first hand acquaintance with European thought and literary and social movements had an untold effect upon Hebrew literature. This acquaintance was made possible mainly by the spread of the Russian Jewish students to the universities abroad—the Jewish youth being obliged to seek an intellectual refuge outside of Russia, on account of the exclusion laws in the

higher schools of that country. The Weltschmerz, feigned or real, which has found utterance in various ways in Europe, coupled itself with the national and the individual sorrow that had been rankling in the breast of the young Jew, and created among a number of the contemporary Hebrew writers a fund of pessimism which has, to a great extent, made itself felt in their productions. At the same time, there was brought into Hebrew literature the individualism of a Nietzsche, scientific method, artistic taste and form, precision of word and description, and realism as understood by Zola and Maupassant. As for form, the unsettled life of the Jew, particularly in Eastern Europe, his restlessness and his propensity for migration, have been favorable to the short story rather than to the lengthy novel. There has thus been created a Hebrew story, artistic in technique, and, generally, psychologic in presentation, delineating the individual in a variety of moods and situations; but, at the same time, marked by a minute, torturing self-analysis, by an impotence in the will of the heroes, and by an outlook upon life that is gloomy and despondent.

A representative of this class of writers is Micah Joseph Berditschevsky. This author is an opponent of Ahad Ha-Am and his ultra-nationalistic ideas, and has almost succeeded in establishing a literary school for himself, his writings having, for the moment, caught the fancy of the public. Ahad Ha-Am regards Jewish life from the viewpoint of the national genius; even his theory of the redemption of Israel is not that of material but of spiritual salvation. Berditschevsky revolts against this apotheosis of the spirit. Jewish life has, in his view, been too much narrowed down in the Galuth, has been reduced to asceticism. It is, therefore, necessary that there be "a revaluation of values" in Jewish reality. The encroachments of the spirit must be limited, and the flesh be given its full rights and privileges.

Berditschevsky has been influenced in this view of life by the individualistic theories of Nietzsche,—an influence that is manifest in the style, terminology, and the general tenor of his essays.

He has also produced a considerable number of stories and sketches. Of these, the portraits of the individuals of his own town are real and vivid; his sketches of the life of the Hasidim are, at times, striking in the manner of their ending; his tales based upon Jewish legend, on the other hand, are marked by lack of imagination,—and his stories of modern life represent that morbidness and minute, unrelieved psychologic analysis characteristic of the class of writers above described.

One of the most representative of the pessimistic group of Hebrew story writers, of those who hold that "Life is but an empty dream," is J. Domoshevitzky, or, as he is best known by his nom-de-plume, J. Bershadsky (1871–1908). The literary activity of this writer expressed itself in two novels and a number of short stories. It is the former, however, that are the most characteristic, and, therefore, will be discussed in this connection. Of these two novels, "Aimless" was the first published, but anyone reading this and then following it up with "Against the Current," the other novel of Bershadsky, will conclude that the latter was the first written, for in it we find "Aimless," as it were, in embryo. In "Against the Current," the author broaches a theme, which he defends: the vain endeavors of the Jews to hold their own under present circumstances; and if we want to have a real understanding of the writings of Bershadsky, both in themselves and as being illustrative of the spirit of the age, we must bear this theme in mind. For, it is this that determines not only the action and characters of "Against the Current," but also, in a great measure, those of "Aimless." As regards the period as well as the characters with which the novels deal, the former serves as introductory to the latter, as it seems to represent a somewhat less advanced stage of the national revival, and Sapirstein, one of the main characters in "Against the Current," is the foreshadowing, the prototype, of Adamovitz, who is the central figure in "Aimless." Like the attitude of Adamovitz, that of Sapirstein towards the revival, in fact, towards every movement, is negative, with only this difference, that the character of the latter is not yet so outspokenly pessimistic as

that of the former. Sapirstein is in a stage that is nearer to scepticism; within him the struggle is still going on. "The Jew must not yield his national, racial, or even his religious self, he argues, as long as these conceptions (of race, nation, and religion) still exist. This is absolutely clear. And yet he (the hero) is not in sympathy with the nationalists and Palestinians. He does not see any other way out of the dilemma; and yet he can not acknowledge that this is the right issue." This is the state of mind of Sapirstein, who, by the way, leads, at least, a decent life. Adamovitz, on the other hand, is a full-fledged pessimist, not believing in any positive ideal, remaining cold and pessimistic to everything that surrounds him and, at the same time, leading the life of a semi-debauchee, out of sheer ennui; and finally, not even "able to die a decent death."

The repetition of the same character in both novels is thus not accidental, is not due solely to lack of creativeness, but is indicative of the state of mind of the author, the state of mind of a whole class of Hebrew writers. There is one more characteristic feature, however, in these two novels,—a feature entirely Bershadsky's own, and that is, his lack of temperament. Emotion plays a very insignificant part in his writings; reasoning is the motive power in them. To this rationalism is partly due the author's disparaging view of the Jewish revival, which is really based upon sentiment as much as upon reasoning, and upon the former perhaps more than upon the latter. But this rationalism had a further effect upon the two novels. In the first place, to it is to be ascribed the too bulky amount of discussion therein found. Again, it greatly mars the delineation of his female characters. Adamovitz and Bershadsky's other heroes stand out more or less clearly as individuals; Rose Lipshitz and his other heroines are quite hazy, their distinguishing characteristics depending almost entirely upon the degree of rationality or reasonableness they possess. Finally, it has, in general, a pernicious effect upon characterization. There is indeed psychologic insight and acumen in the individualization of Bershadsky's heroes; but the process is painful rather than

enjoyable. The psychologic problem that a Peretz, for example, presents, the psychologic fineness of a Judah Steinberg, manifest the joy of creativeness. The authors themselves intently watch, as it were, their own heroes develop. Bershadsky, in opening the secrets of the heart, goes about it with the pitilessness of a vivisector and leaves behind an open wound. His soul studies are, therefore, painfully dry; they one and all manifest an intellectual strain, a minute psychologic laboratory study. With all this, however, Bershadsky has the merit of having created at least one individuality, Adamovitz, a living personality, boldly delineated, and, at the same time, the expression of a despondent class, probably a passing class of Hebrew writers.

Lack of temperament can by no means be laid to the charge of J. H. Brenner. In this author, sentiment overwhelms rationality; his works, therefore, suffer from too much sanguinity. Brenner is a restless personality. His roving instinct has expressed itself not only in migrations from land to land, but also from ideal to ideal, and the further he has gone in his material and spiritual vagabondage, the more embittered and pessimistic he has become. He has great strength of expression, his style being perhaps the most vigorous in Hebrew prose fiction. His narrative talent is very considerable, and he has a penetrating eye both as regards character and manners. But it is deplorable that his pessimism has of late affected his writings. There is now an almost insulting off-hand mannerism in his style; his psychologic delineations have grown into negative and fragmentary water color sketches, and his humor has been turned into grim satire, whereas the journalistic, controversial element has found predominance in his stories over the belletristic.

The pessimism of J. Berkovitz is neither so thoroughgoing as that of Bershadsky nor so violent as that of Brenner. With him, art has gotten the better of the gloomy outlook on life and has toned it down to a mere malicious whisper. Yet, his heroes are greatly affected by this mild pessimism. Their individuality generally does not stand out prominently by reason of its own merits, but, as in the paintings of Rembrandt, it is brought into

relief by means of the background. It is circumstances, the society within which the heroes of Berkovitz find themselves, within which, in fact, they feel all their loneliness and ennui, that bring out their individuality. Not their strength of character, therefore, but their weakness, their impotence, is what attracts our attention. They are commonly extinguished volcanoes, people in whom the youthful fire has given out, who have become disappointed in the ideals they had cherished, but who are, after all, out of joint in the profane atmosphere that surrounds them.

The stories of Berkovitz distinguish themselves otherwise by a good technique, a beauty of style, and a mild but pleasing humor that has not been uninfluenced by that of his father-in-law, Shalom Aleichem.

Of the other contemporary writers of the same school, may be mentioned G. Schofman and H. D. Nomberg. The former has advanced in realism as far as the pathologic, and has succeeded in stifling in himself all emotions of the creator. The stories and sketches of Nomberg exhibit less art than those of Berkovitz, but his heroes present more individualization, their personalities rising into prominence by virtue of their own attributes and characteristics. Yet the latter belong to the same category of men and women as the creations of the other authors of the class described above. They are individuals inactive and nerveless, living in a nebulous world of their own, without the power of adaptability to the society around them and without the faculty of absorbing any bright rays that radiate from the world without.

With this class of writers, may be contrasted a group of novelists and story writers of talent, who stand under the direct influence of the national revival and whose perspective is more sunny. In the productions of these writers, light and shadow are fairly harmoniously distributed; the heroes are generally healthier and more balanced and possess more mettle and energy,—and the atmosphere is charged with more life and activity. Of these may here be mentioned A. A. Kabak and

M. Smeliansky. The former is the author of a number of short stories and one novel, "In Solitude," the heroes of which are well defined and the single incidents well presented but not coördinated with sufficient skill. Smeliansky is more talented and more productive. He is the most gifted of a group of authors whose talent has developed on Palestinian soil and in whose creations the fresh fragrance of mother earth is felt. He has written a number of sketches of the life of the Palestinian Arabs and some stories and novels of the life of the Jews of that country, particularly those living in the colonies.

CHAPTER XI

THE FEUILLETON, LITERARY CRITICISM, AND ALLIED BRANCHES; CONCLUSION

THERE are some other literary branches, cognate to fiction, which have found expression in the Hebrew: the feuilleton, literary criticism, the prose poem, etc. The feuilleton, a literary product originating with the French and almost unknown in English, made its appearance in Hebrew shortly after the creation of the newspaper; it is only of late, however, that it has attained to any sort of perfection. Previously, during the age of the Melizah, it had run the risk of degenerating into a mere vehicle for punning; for was not the Hebrew style as a whole simply a play upon words, dependent upon the brilliance of the language rather than upon that of personality? And such, in the main, the Hebrew feuilleton of that time really was. The contemporary feuilleton, on the contrary, is, like the story and the poem, a real criticism of life, and, like them, it is marked by a personal note and by artistic workmanship never before known in this domain in Hebrew literature. In criticism, too, great advance has been made since the days of Kovner (see supra, p. 56). The Hebrew has, to be sure, not yet given birth to a Taine or a Brandes; but there has sprung up a good deal of native talent, which, with a better understanding of literary principles and a keener appreciation of artistic values, exerted a wholesome influence upon Hebrew letters. And corresponding progress has been made also in other directions.

Of the numerous writers in the various branches, only a few names can here be mentioned and the briefest notice given them:

The talent of David Frishman is not confined to the feuilleton alone, but extends likewise over the domains of story, poetry, and criticism. Yet, his writings are assigned a place here, because it is in the feuilleton that he really excels; in fact, the

spirit and tone of this kind of literary production dominate all his works.

Frishman has never directly identified himself with the national revival movement; he is too Mephistophelian for that. He is essentially an iconoclast, and were it not for the considerable esthetic taste that he possesses, his cynicism would have gotten the upper hand in his writings. It is this taste, plus a dash and brilliancy of style, that has been his saving grace. For he displays neither depth nor originality or creativeness in any of the literary branches in which he has engaged. In his stories there is almost a total lack of imagination; they are set down with skill, but they are inventions, not creations. His lyrics are deficient in sincerity, and his ballads exhibit an imitation of Heine both in form and treatment. In his criticisms there is some taste and insight, but there is, at the same time, a lack of constructive power and they are exercised with a good deal of malignity. His portraits of men, of literary and other notabilities, particularly as regards their foibles and ludicrous sides, are vivid and reconstructive. In all these, however, there are to be found the characteristic squint and smack of the feuilleton; for this is the proper domain of Frishman. In his feuilletons, the poignancy and brilliancy of style stand him in good stead, lending him an air of originality and giving animation to his remarks and criticism of life, however trite and superficial they be.

Different in tone from the feuilletons of Frishman are those of A. L. Levinsky. Those of the former approach the satiric essay; they lay hold on a subject, exhaust it, lay bare all its foibles, and, strike home caustically at all weak points. The feuilletons of Levinsky are formed of lighter stuff. They are humorous rather than satiric; they are a criticism of life without the sting and bitterness of censure. They generally do not grapple with one subject only, but deal with life as it is reflected in passing events and transitory occurrences, connecting all these into one whole, not so much by means of a central idea as by a suggestive phrase or expression. Their humor is peculiarly Jewish; the racy Talmudic diction, the good-natured, familiar, conversational

style, and the well-feigned naivety of the provincial Jew,—all these are employed by Levinsky with great effect. In short, Levinsky is the typical, characteristically Jewish, feuilletonist.

The feuilleton, as well as criticism, has been manipulated with some skill also by N. Sokolov; but neither of these rises with him above the level of drawing-room talk. He is, however, the greatest Jewish journalist writing for Jews; at any rate, he is the typical journalist, fluent and ubiquitous, writing in several languages with equal ease and on every subject within the range of the article and the essay: social, political, and literary. His style is as protean as his writings; it is plastic, easily adapting itself to the nature of the latter, though somewhat crude and unpolished. His knowledge is extensive, and he has a good deal of common sense and a quickly assimilative power.

One of the finest stylists in Hebrew is R. Brainin, whose diction is brilliant, though exhibiting a good deal of posing and seeking after effect. Brainin displayed great activity in various literary branches: journalism, the story, criticism, and biography. His journalistic writings are of no great value and his stories are the work of an amateur. As regards his criticisms, they have contributed their mite towards the placing of certain authors in Hebrew. On the whole, however, his literary ideas and tastes are dictated by outside influences to such an extent as to be rather misleading in some cases. For the critical principles in vogue in European literatures cannot always be applied to the Hebrew, without leaving margin for racial and circumstantial differences. And Brainin does not always take this truth into consideration. It is mainly in biography that this writer really excels. He is the Boswell of Hebrew literature, dogging his Johnson at every step, and, in this manner, throwing light not only upon his life but also upon his times.

Joseph Klausner is the disciple of Ahad Ha-Am, judging things from the point of view of his master's precepts. He possesses marvelous erudition and a certain amount of historic insight; but he exhibits hardly any originality of thought. He is active in many fields: critical, historical, journalistic, making a mark in

them all. And if in his criticisms he does not penetrate to the real essence of the literary creations, his opinions are yet generally suggestive.

Of the younger critics, J. Fichman is very promising. There is, it is true, too much circumstantiality and temperamental effusion in his critical works; but out of them emerge a fine artistic taste, a great power of analysis, and a more than a mediocre reconstructive ability.

The prose poem has been essayed by many; but none has been so successful in it as H. Zeitlin. This writer has been largely influenced by Nietzsche, like whom he seeks God in man; he is pathetic, emotional, and a great weeper. There is a good deal of coquetry in his writings, which, however, contain a great deal of beauty. He has also written a number of philosophic essays and has contributed to the understanding of the life and doctrines of the Hasidim.

In this book, the author has endeavored to trace the evolution of Hebrew literature from the middle of the nineteenth century to our own time, in its relation to Jewish history and to the foreign cultures and literatures amidst which it grew and by the tendencies and ideas of which it was influenced. In this course of development, Hebrew literature has made marked progress in all directions. From a meandering streamlet, forgotten by the inhabited world and underfed by rains and dews from heaven, it has broadened out into a lordly river, swelled by tributaries and constantly gaining in depth. In point of art, there has been an advance both in expression and in representation of the subject. In the observation and appreciation of nature, too, immense gains have been made. As for characterization and the manifestation of the personal element as a whole, there has been a veritable "revaluation of values." The movement has been going on, to use a Spencerian phrase, from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous, the differentiation and individualization taking place both in the creations and in the the authorsmselves, in their manners and mannerisms, and

in their forms of expression. Hebrew literature has indeed travelled a great distance from the novels of Mapu, where the heroes are mere embodiments of ideas, of virtues and vices, without even representing types, to the stories and sketches of a Steinberg, with their varied and highly individualized characters, and from the class sentiment of the Maskilim to the very personal equation in the contemporary literary productions, as influenced by Nietzsche's "superman."

A word as to the future of Hebrew literature. For many reasons, the uncertainty as to the progress of this literature in times to come is quite legitimate. It is true that the Hebrew is the heritage of an eleven-million-headed people, that it has a history of thousands of years, and that it has, moreover, advanced considerably for the last half century. All this, however, cannot serve as an indicator of its further progress in the future; for there are many causes that work against it in our own time—causes that threaten its very existence. In the first place, Hebrew is, after all, a language understood by comparatively few of the Jews, and spoken by still less. Then, again, it is everywhere exposed to the unequal competition of the native languages, which constantly encroach upon its territory, just as they encroach upon that of the Jewish vernacular, Yiddish. What, then, is the future of Hebrew literature? What are its hopes of maintaining itself with such odds in its disfavor? When the Hebrew poet Bialik recently visited Palestine, he was asked how it was that he had not given his people a poem which should embody the national aspirations of the nation and nerve it to self-activity. He answered: "It is for you, Palestinian Jews, who are in the process of building up a new national life, to give us Jews of the diaspora, whose national existence is in the state of dissolution, this song of national revival." May not the reply of Bialik serve as a key to the problem of Hebrew literature? In the western countries Hebrew is doomed to extinction; as a matter of fact, Hebrew is even now semi-extinct in western Europe and in America. For no culture, however elastic it be, can for long preserve, under modern conditions, its

integrity in the midst of other cultures, which are upheld by life and circumstances. It is in Palestine, where a young Jewish national life is now striking root, budding out and unfolding itself in all directions, particularly the cultural, that Hebrew literature will ultimately have to seek refuge. There, in the land of its birth, opposed by no vigorous foreign culture, Hebrew will be able to work out its future destiny, provided the course of its development is not cut short by some external intervention.

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